TAHITI LAND FALL

DECORATIONS BY NICOLAS MORDVINOFF

Morrow

By WILLIAM S. STONE

# TAHITI LANDFALL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHODEHCE AND IGOR ANZIERROFF ALLAN

William S. Stone

# Tahiti Land-fall

MORROW

# *TAHITI LANDFALL*

*by*

WILLIAM S. STONE

Author of *The Ship of Flame*

Not many of those weary with work and worry can pack up and sail away towards soft tropical breezes, and the dreamy carefree life of the Tahitian islands, but they can do the next best thing, that is, read *Tahiti Landfall*.

Mr. Stone takes us with him to his island paradise that rivals the land of the lotus-eaters. And here, surrounded by the brightly colored beauty of the south sea island landscape, where the mountains rise sharply out of deep blue lagoons, he tells us of a life of incredible ease. It is, nevertheless, a life not without its fun and excitement.

(*continued on back flap*)

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(*continued from front flap*)

The author's own establishment under a roof-tree is managed by Tavae and Teuru — brother and sister — and the most charming and irresponsible creatures one can hope to meet. Every household chore becomes a delightful escapade.

In fact, every activity, from putting in a washbasin to building a house, gathering in the coconut crop, or stealing a chicken, turns into a highly entertaining story, and, as often as not, a wild celebration.

From Tahiti, Mr. Stone takes us to another and, if possible, even lovelier island — Huahine — which is well off the beaten tourist path. Here Mam Ruau guards her village against the evil spirits, and Haapu, the Chief, presides over the feast table.

There is love as well as laughter. Romance flourishes with a pleasant abandon, so in keeping with the customary native lack of formality and restraint.

Nicolas Mordvinoff's charming chapter headings and the 32 beautiful photographs enhance Mr. Stone's fascinating text.

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# LANDFALL

by
WILLIAM S. STONE

*Decorations by* NICOLAS MORDVINOFF
*Photographs by*
PRUDENCE *and* IGOR ANZIFEROFF ALLAN

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*Collection of photographs by Prudence and Igor Anziferoff Allen in Photographic Insert I & II*

*TAHITI LANDFALL*

# Foreward

WHO SHALL SAY how many dreams have been, and now are, dominated by the single alluring word-Tahiti. Today, perhaps, more people than ever before - and they are scattered over the whole round earth - are definitely planning to put substance in their dream. They are making preparations to sail away, at last, to where, under eager eyes, far fair Tahiti rises above the shining South Pacific.

We who live here know how varied the newcomers will be. They will range from the little Swiss watchmaker who has scarcely been away from his mountain village, to a retired admiral of the world's greatest navy, familiar with all the seven seas. They will come, and a few will stay; most, of necessity, will return whence they came.

I have been fortunate. For nearly a decade I have lived in and loved the Tahitian Islands. Yet certainly, not every man finds here his gold at the end of the rainbow dream. To some it seems a lost paradise-a beauty that was, apparently, but is no more. And disappointment wields ever a drab brush. But for myself, no disillusionment has come and I am unable to conceive of a rime when these islands may have had more to offer of charm, of romance, laughter, and adventure than they have today.

So, if the reader of these lines is expecting to learn of the sad passing of the true Polynesian, or of the disappearance of the old life, he should seek that dismal tale elsewhere. By which I do not mean to imply that the native folk who surround me are clad in beaten bark cloth or that they continue to cut off the ears of warriors in the next district over the hill. There have been innovations since Captains Wallis, Cook and Bligh first sailed into the bright blue bays, but they have been largely superficial ones and both inhabitants and place remain, as perhaps they always will, nearly indestructible. Polynesians in this area are neither hurrying to extinction, nor is their blood being greatly thinned with that of strangers. On the contrary, they are multiplying lustily and happily. The inter mixture brought about by ardent tars in whaling days steadily eliminated as those with a fraction of white chromosomes marry others who have none. Native physiognomy and native character bid fair someday to show as little trace of the white man's early interest in cross-breeding as do the unbroken lagoon surfaces the passage of foreign ships. For which, the Lord be praised.

The doughty, red-faced Englishmen who first got ashore on Tahiti looked in astonishment at the multitude of tall, brown skinned people who came to greet them. Such physical grace and beauty they had surely never seen, yet it seems to have been the bodily cleanliness of the islanders which struck them

most forcibly - a fact not especially remarkable if it be recalled that bathing had, at that time, achieved no popularity in Merrie England.

"What place is this?" King George's subjects managed with elaborate gestures to inquire.

The natives understood. "O Tahiti," they replied. "It is Tahiti."

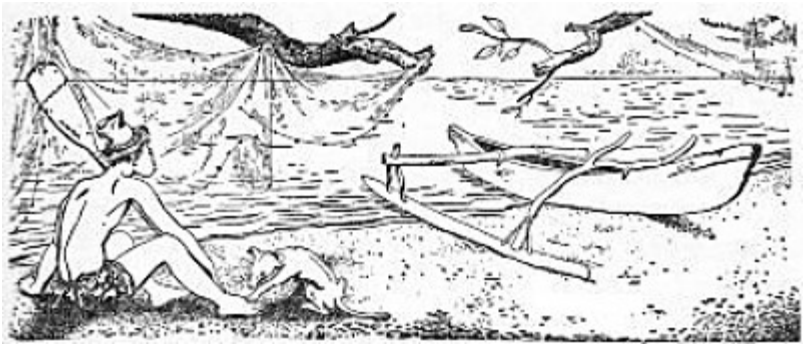
"Otaheiti?"

"O Tahiti."

"Oh." The British ears were not quick and they jotted down incorrectly on their charts, intending, however, to give good civilized names to the island and all its parts when they could get around to it. They did, eventually, get around to it, and so did other navigators who followed. But the strange thing is that "Nouvelle Cythère," "Artemise," and "Port Royal" are forgotten. The splendid peak remains Mt. Aorai and the anchorage of the ungainly ships of French and Englishmen continues fabled Matavai. Two world wars have come and gone, and yet this island declines greatly to change. In the words of the natives who first marveled at his majesty' good ship *Dolphin* (that canoe-without-outrigger) "it is Tahiti" - still. And the sight which meets your eyes as you approach the circling reefs is much the same as that at which simple sailors our of Liverpool, New Bedford, and Marseilles gaped one hundred and fifty years ago.

People ask what is the best time for an arrival. I cannot answer. There is incessant argument as to just which of the twenty-four hours is the most fortunate. But this much may be said: to anyone who has lived here, it does not matter. The mere fact of return is enough to make any hour, any season, the most magical of all. Let the sky be moonless black with the land silent-looming, indistinct, and only slightly deeper shadowed than the night. Even so his mind will see it clearly, the streams and valleys, the climbing ridges and the high plateaux. To him, a torch on the distant reef is no wavering pin-point flame but a noble flare of tight-bound fronds which throws its ruddy light on bronze-shouldered fishermen, on naked children, on vahines with their unbound hair. Perhaps it is Toma with his long straight spear, or Tau or Heimata - and he would swear he heard their cries and song. Let him fill his lungs with the island's soft out-sweeping breath and he has no further need for eyes, because no single thing is eloquent of what lies hidden by the tropic darkness as is the night breeze that rolls from cooling mountainsides to brush the massed gardenias and then drift out to sea. The tiare Tahiti - the flower-of Tahiti - is there upon the wind and it will tell him surely that he's come home again. And yet, should he happen back when rain shrouds all the higher peaks, when gray and heavy seas go crashing on the barrier and palms whip inland with their fronds outstretched in howling gale, he really wouldn't mind. He'd revel in the storm and be peering through the scud to find the thatch roof that shelters those he has grown to love; he'd be seeking out the inlet where he caught the giant shrimp, or the grove of gnarled old mape trees where he first met Tu and slim, almond-eyed Natai.

What sort of white man is he whose heart will quicken so at sight of a small island well down below the line? Well, he may be of any age, of any race, and he may have come from Nome or from Nebraska, from Maine or California. Perhaps he was a miner, a flyer, a farmer, or dean of a school of law. In returning to Tahiti he shows he is a member of the small group of those who can never leave for long, who can never again feel quite at ease within themselves in any other place.



# PART ONE
## The House of Singing Bamboo

### I. *A Return*

"MONSIEUR BEEL," Teuru munnured ecstatically, "Monsieur Beel is back again. It has been a long thing."

Her brother Tavae nodded his head vigorously. "Beel Tane!" he grinned with a quick flash of strong, white teeth. Tane, as most everyone knows, signifies no more than "man" or, following a name, it may be "mister." But Tavae's exclamation gained by emphasis and intonation a world of further meaning. All in a breath he was saying, "Good friend, dear friend, we wept when you went away and we were sad for days thereafter - for three or five or seven. Then the pain was gone and we could remember how, after the second bottle of orange beer, you tried to dance like us and we could laugh again; we could remember the strange sounds you made when you would sing and how it was always the same song, the one that goes 'Arutu, te nave nave-e-e!' and we could laugh and be happy about that also. Now you are here once more and we have wept still again - but not this time for sorrow. Aue, no, not sorrow!"

It was necessary only to lean forward to give his brown shoulder an affectionate shake. What pleasure it is to know one's missed, what redoubled pleasure to be frankly, simply welcome back! And never doubt the sincerity of a Tahitian greeting, for here is a people that has never learned the devious art of hypocrisy, whose thoughts and words are as direct an uncompromising as a healthy ten-year-old's.

They sat on their heels, the girl's compact body encased a bright blue pareu, the Polynesian sarong, splashed by a sign of huge white flowers, and Tavae wearing a scrip of same brilliant cloth bound short and tight about his

thighs that his muscular legs were exposed to their entire length. The sun, already low over the lagoon, slanted through the fringe of thatch at the eaves to cast warm light over the two supple young bodies and cause their fine-textured skin to glow. Could five years have passed since these two first came work for the popaa, the foreigner? Of course they were little more than children then . . . but so they still remained. And so also, a man suspects, they always will.

But perhaps "work" is not the word. It is not work to for a house made of polished woods, of pandanus and bamboo. Better call it fun. Nor is it work to prepare food on fascinating shiny thing of white enamel which burns - not wood, or charcoal, or husks of coconut - but marvelous kerosene. No, rather it is play. As for the box-of-frozen-water with its dazzling, baffling inner light which flicks on the minute the door's swung wide, well, that is sheer delight. Tavae's part is no more irksome. Copra-making, adzing canoe, fishing - it's all as normal and pleasant as breathing. Pushing the lawn mower is, of course, something more significant and gives an exhilarating sense of mechanical mastery. Too, the whirling blades make a pretty music and he finds apparently, impossible to keep from going into a sort of dance as he follows the enchanted machine over the lawns. Tavae is, he would wish me to mention, the best dancer of our district, if not of the entire island. In times of peace when Bastille Day was celebrated in Oceania with greater enthusiasm, if with less understanding, than in France, he won many prizes for his abandoned rendition of the otea, the ori-Tahiti and apa-rima - all done to the beat of many drums and without the encumbrance of a lawn mower. And yet, like his sister, he will perform the most simple tasks, whether it be the cleaving of a drinking nut or the cleaning of a newly caught fish, with the same grace that he does the ancient hula.

Tavae's mind rarely stirs up thoughts of its own accord. But it is quick to mirror and repeat, and sometimes expand, an idea that is placed before it provided the idea be uncomplex. Teuru's remark had pleased him. "It has been a long thing," he repeated. "We have waited and the hours, then the days and weeks and months moved with the slowness of a sea-porcupine walking on its spines across the coral beds. Ah, what a time of waiting!"

I was still sitting, like any tourist, half smothered by ten or a dozen heis - jasmine, hibiscus and tiare - draped about my neck. A single flower garland in a warm country is all very well, but double them up and the perspiration starts to roll. "If you come right down to it, Tavae," I said, putting the heis aside, "eight weeks, or nine, is nothing." And so, I realized rather guiltily, it had seemed.

There had been barely time for attending to the few business matters with which even a confirmed idler is plagued: the day had come to sail.

A young woman, friend of many years, came to see me off. The morning was bleak with a chill wind swirling fog about the tall towers of the newly

erected San Francisco bridges. Far from the docks where the popular Hawaiian cruises sailed, we came out on to a pier.

"Why," said Alice, "there is no one here."

She was very nearly right. There were certainly no waving crowds, no paper streamers, and there was nothing in sight which remotely resembled the luxury liners *Monterrey, Mariposa* or *Lurline*. Two men stood with their coat collars turned up, hands deep in their pockets. Shipping agents they must have been, and they stared gloomily at the rusting hulk which made them their livelihood. We, also, stared at the *Wairuna* where she lay, squat and deep-laden, in the flotsam-marred water.

Alice's nose turned up slightly. "It doesn't look very clean, she said dubiously.

"No," I admitted, "there's no spit and polish about the *Wairuna*. But what ship would look better that has carried a copra fire in her hold and had her bottom scraped by a dozen coral reefs?"

Alice made no answer because at that moment a gust of wind whipped over the high-piled deckload to blow finely powdered coal in our eyes and cause us to make a quick about face. We thus discovered that still two more souls were gathered at this forlorn fag-end of nowhere.

They sat side by side upon a packing case with their backs against the unpainted warehouse: a Tahitian boy and girl, neither of whom was over twenty. The lad held a weather beaten guitar, and between them stood a bottle. As if our turning had been a signal they burst into song. I'll not translate. The words, lusty and ribald enough to suit any waterfront audience from Papeete to Singapore, would have been the envy of Rabelais himself. But what crazy magic was this? Suddenly it seemed the chill was gone from the air, the gray from the skies. The quick throb of the plucked strings, the wild melody sprung from lonely atolls sent a warmth coursing through the blood which good wine never equaled.

Thoughtless for the moment of my friend, I ran to the two children of a sunnier land. "Timi! How the devil did *you* get here?"

Timi stopped, looked up. "Gottam," he exclaimed happily "if it ain't papa Bill!"

Like a couple of fools we grabbed each other and embraced and slapped backs as if we were long lost pals. Our sole previous intercourse had consisted of a few casual greetings exchanged on the streets of Papeete. But now it was vastly different. We were four thousand miles from those same not-so clean streets, but we'd known them and shared them, together with all the fresh, untarnished countryside beyond. Timi's chocolate color had faded a little; my own tan had evaporated, leaving me like any other paleface, and yet we were in that minute closer than many a pair of brothers.

"Remember Miri?" said Timi when we had got untangled.

I remembered Miri when she was about fifteen, before she went away to go into the movies, and now she laughed and came up and put her face on one

side of mine and then the other in a gesture that was a sort of mixture of the French system of cheek-kissing and the old Tahitian ceremony of rubbing noses. It sounds funny but it was pretty - and so was Miri, extremely so. Tardily I recalled that I had not come alone and turned to look for Alice. She was there, standing near, smiling. It was still cold and we closed in on the packing case and the bottle.

"You taking your vahine back with you?" Timi inquired.

"She doesn't like the *Wairuna's* looks."

"Well, the looks aren't half of it, lady," he told her affably. "Her plates are rusted so thin you can poke your finger through 'em, and that old wheeze-box they got to push her along up and dies every second day. But that don't matter; so long as she keeps afloat there's no big hurry. Hope she don't stall right on the line, though. Know why? 'Cause we're hauling a cargo of dried blood and, boy, when that stuff begins to get warm it won't smell so good. And that's when the copra bugs'll start waking up and making a cloud about the ship." He looked at Alice intently. "You know about copra bugs?"

She shook her head.

"Well," he replied earnestly, "it isn't that they bite so bad unless you anger 'em but my advice to you, if you're thinking of going, would be to get some mighty tight fitting piripo."

Alice was a little bewildered. "Piripo?" she asked doubtfully.

"Pants." Timi lifted the bottle and then the guitar and sang about how high the women come in the USA - "tandis qu'à Tahiti on les a pour rien." A fair ditty, but inaccurate.

The foghorn of the *Wairuna* let out a prolonged bleat and someone was to be heard calling down from the bridge, "Where are those blarsted passengers?" Timi and I got under way. We crossed over and stepped on to the deck which, so low did the ship ride, was all on a level with the dock and there, standing between mountains of coal to right and left, we faced the two girls who were to remain behind.

"When you get back to Hollywood, Miri," Timi advised sagely, "you save your money, see? Go easy on the men and the whiskey and you'll be the richest woman in Tahiti some day."

There was a slow threshing at the stern and already the ship was edging away from the pier. Across twenty feet of soiled water Miri's careless laugh came clearly. "Money! I got enough to buy all Moorea. What you think I want with money?"

Timi frowned and shook his head. He looked to me. "Maybe I shouldn't have left her; she's got no sense .... "

Alice and I called back and forth a few times while we could but there was little to say. I'd spent most of the night before on the Top of the Mark trying to explain to her why one should be drawn continually back to a distant island, and I knew I had not succeeded. Miri was close beside her bare-headed, her hair flying out in the wind, and in comparison the American girl looked no

end civilized. When we swung into the stream they were lost to sight and I felt a momentary twinge of sadness.

But Timi had seated himself unconcernedly on the coal. He swung up the guitar. "Burn the reef," he sighed, "if I ain't a happy man now. Seventeen days and seventeen nights and we'll be eating roast pig and miti hue - aue te aue!" (Aue, a marvelous word, receives a hundred different inflections. It may express wonder, pain, unbelief, perplexity, grief or joy. Timi charged the expletive with exuberant joy.) He whanged out a raucous chord and lifted his voice to sing of the little wooden horse on the merry-go-round-which might sound like a child's lullaby, but isn't.

Yes, there were seventeen days in which to leave the fog and gain the tropic skies, seventeen nights in which to leave Polaris and raise the Southern Cross. Seventeen-allowing for *Wairuna's* fitful starts and stops. But who cares now if it be long? Time is left behind where the crowded, bustling city lies. Let it stay there in the land of clocks and offices and appointments and hurry and worry. And let the old ship make its leisured, wallowing way across the globe for its meeting with the sun.

Now - newly, gratefully returned - I looked through Tahiti's palms. Far down the strand I could see a blunt, rust colored bow deliberately emerging from Papeete's pass. Slowly the vessel poked out into the Pacific swell, swinging round till she presented her disreputable beam to the still bright west. A white plume showed against her stack and seconds later the horn's deep note struck faint upon our ears.

Teuru turned her head. "Te pahi," she said, "the ship."

I nodded. *Wairuna* was on her wanderings again, outbound for Raratonga, plodding down the gently sloping sea. Good-by, old friend, I thought; till next year when you've come round the world once more . .

A laugh from the girl brought me out of the fatuous reverie. "The shoes, Monsieur Beel," she exclaimed, putting out a hand to touch them, "they are so funny!"

It happened to be that year when some infernal fiend designed men's footgear with the obvious intent of torture. I glared at the pointed toes, then wrenched the things off and tossed them to Teuru, who turned them curiously this way and that before she looked up inquiringly. "Hide them," I told her, "throw 'em away - anything."

She smiled. "And the piripo. I take them, too? There is a new pareu, red with yellow flowers. . . ."

"Yes!" I jumped out of the miserable, confining trousers, wrapped on the cool cotton print.

"That's better," Tavae approved as he watched me lean back in the cane chair and, with legs outstretched in the breeze, give way to a luxurious wriggling of toes.

Better? Timi had nothing on me. Burn the reef if I, too, was not a happy

man.

## II. *Of Time and Teuru*

ON PIRAE LAGOON the trades wake with the sun. They swing in past the point which separates us from Cook's Bay and set the broad sheet of water trembling, shimmering, beckoning for the morning swim. The breeze comes upon the house which stands there by the sea, finds its way under the eaves, slips through the interstices between the pencil-thin, foot-long bamboos which trim the walls where they join the roof. And at the wind's touch these loosely held stems of bamboo, ranged like the slender pipes of a miniature organ all round the dwelling, are made both animate and articulate. One must look closely to detect the merry dance which then begins, for the movement within the frames that hold the performers at top and bottom is very slight. But the resultant woodily musical conversation is beautifully dear, and it rises and falls as do the breaths of air which bring it into being. The mornings are few that I do not waken to find the little concert in progress, and rarely is it twice the same. For a few points' difference in the direction of the wind, a small variation of its intensity, will bring into play an entirely different section of the circumscribing, marimba-like orchestra. The hollowed reeds tap lightly upon each other or against the confining supports, or revolve with a faint tremolo within their places, the most slender stems voicing their thin trebles and the diapason pipes - of the size of a man's thumb - supplying the basses.

Wherever one lives it is unquestionably the proper thing to leap out of bed the moment eyes are open. Yet in my Pirae house of singing bamboo there is always the temptation to linger a while listening to the elfin music and to the other sounds which filter through the breaking day. On the morning following my most recent return I found it especially easy to give way to such pleasant seduction and to lie still.

Up in the crests of the coco palms there was a hilarious chorus from the irrepressible myna birds. Others, with a light rustling, hopped about on the thatch roof and a heavier snapping and crackling of the dried pandanus leaves told that Beau, the magnificent Persian cat sent by a dear aunt in distant

Massachusetts, was there patiently and futilely stalking them. From down by the sea came the cheerful yapping of the cairn terrier where he continued his ancient game of chasing the foaming tracks of little waves. There was a lusty crow from the chicken coop farther inland and it was taken up by the nearest neighbor's cock, then by the next and the next till it dwindled away in the interior. Well, you might say, these are no more than barnyard noises such as may be heard anywhere, and the fitful "music" of the walls is simply what comes of bad carpentry - a disturbance which a properly driven nail or two would silence and so bring decent peace. Maybe. But to me, lying beneath the pareu which had cloaked me from the night's welcome chill, they were cadenced sounds forming a symphony that meant tranquility and easy living. They spoke with sweet assurance, telling me that I was back upon the island named Tahiti beside the beach called Moving Sands.

There are people who maintain that Tahiti is all right enough as a living-place if one has work to accomplish - if one be a painter, a sculptor, a writer or a planter. Otherwise, so they say, it is an excellent place in which to go quietly mad. What do you *do* all the time? is a question the white resident of the South Seas is posed many a hundred times. And always I have wished it were possible truthfully to answer: *nothing*. What happier condition, I ask myself, could be imagined? But by such a reply I should mean nothing - doing as it would be defined by New York and San Francisco friends: neither spinning nor weaving, neither making hay while the tropic sun shines, nor furiously striving by whatever sort of distraction to pass the time.

Pass the time! Never, I think, before I learned to love the islands did the horror of those words fully dawn upon me. Could anything be more awful than the sadly universal occupation they describe? Still, like many another, I too formerly engaged in it with wholehearted desperation, recklessly and determinedly annihilating the present with eyes always fixed on some distant future. But never here. Only when, periodically and temporarily, an ocean has got between me and the desired land do I find myself at "pass-times," throwing away the days and hours as speedily as may be till the next ship sails.

In Tahiti the problem is quite reversed and one would arrest each fleeting moment, prolong each revolving day, living it, savoring it, clasping it, as though there were never another to follow. Although I am far from sure of it, there may well be more exalted aims in human existence than deep and grateful awareness of that very existence in itself. Yet surely, in any case, few goals are harder come by or, once attained, more rich in their reward. Possibly, then, a man who sits silently beside the sea upon Tahiti's shores - or even one who lies shamelessly abed listening to the murmurous house about him to the winds and stirring early morning - is not precisely idle. More than likely he is busied in the extreme, busied with knowing, perceiving, with feeling the island-dotted world in which great good fortune has deposited him. There is never enough time for such an occupation, and if it be pointed out

that of those who are free to do little else but contemplate Tahiti's loveliness many appear eventually to gravitate to a study of the color of the island rum - why, I would say that nothing is proved except, perhaps, a predilection for such far from unpleasant pursuits in whatever place or clime.

It was nearly six, the hour at which Teuru was supposed to have a bowl of coffee on the table. I got up, pulled on some swimming trunks and walked out across the soft green lawn to the sloping beach of fine black sand. Tavae was there, bending over his canoe while he tied on the outrigger with coconut cord. He had been similarly employed when I left a few months before. Presumably it was a fresh break which he now repaired; the outrigger was forever falling off, though never twice giving way in the same place. But despite the bits of fence wire, rags and twine with which the booms were held together it was a good canoe and he was proud of it.

He glanced up and smiled. "Bon jour," he said genially "Are you a good thing this morning?"

I was looking down the beach in the direction of Papeete. A half-mile arc of the strand was there in sight and, if there were any order to island affairs, Teuru should have been visible returning from the town market with a filled basket on her arm.

"Thank you," I said, "I am a good enough thing, and if there were any sign of breakfast I should be a better one still. It is six o'clock, you know."

"'Ah, yes. At six o'clock - coffee! " Tavae quoted my repeated instructions, even getting a suggestion of Yankee accent in his French. Then he laughed comfortably. "You have not changed, Monsieur Beel. I am glad."

"Clearly your sister is also unchanged."

He straightened and gave a gentle shake to the slender, looping boom which supported the outrigger aft. It held. "Yes, Teuru is the same. She will always be the same."

If I could have recognized the utter truth of his words at the time it would have been a great saving of trouble. But I was to spend several more years in trying to alter both Teuru's and Tavae's indolent-seeming ways. Doubtless it was efficiency in the management of the house which I then imagined I was after. There should be fixed times for breakfast, lunch and dinner; for shaving, bathing and siesta. Certain days should be reserved for certain things-Monday for washing, Wednesday for cutting the riotously growing lawns, Thursday the dog should be scrubbed and the cat combed, Saturday was for thorough house-cleaning and Sunday for churchgoing. My two retainers did go to prayer meeting each Sunday, but in nothing else ever achieved regularity. Of course they were right; I was wrong. And today I can only wonder that I was so appallingly slow in learning that the coffee is quite the same if it turns up at six or seven or eight, that the sheets are as snowily white if draped upon the bushes for drying on any day at all, that the dog will get ticks in its ears and the Persian fur-balls in its stomach with the same certainty regardless of anything. I am much indebted to Tavae and Teuru for helping me, over the

years, to so elemental a discovery and now-a-days I mind strictly my own affairs, leaving the house, lawns, animals, my man and girl, all to go their own ways. The result, as anyone not of New England stock would have sooner suspected, is blissful harmony. The house is immaculate, the lawns ever trim, the pets' health abundant, Tavae laughs, Teuru sings - and I am left free to devote my attention to other matters if I should ever find any that require it.

On the morning of which I speak I had yet to achieve such serenity. "When Teuru arrives," I said to Tavae, "if Teuru arrives, tell her that I am displeased."

"Certainement, Monsieur Beel. Without fault I will do it."

And he would, too. "The popaa is angry," he would say.

"Truly?"

"Yes, his belly is empty and he is angry." Then they would both double up with laughter as if nothing could be funnier than a man without breakfast. "What did you have at Quinn's?" Tavae would ask as soon as he had his breath.

"Well, let us see ... I had first a Cointreau, then a rum punch and lastly, I think, a pineapple wine."

There is the crux of the whole matter of Teuru's non-appearance upon the beach of moving sands at six o'clock or at any other particular hour. It all lies at, and within, the wide, hospitable, inviting doors of Quinn's cabaret. Not that she fails to arise seasonably and leave her house; she is abroad when stars are still bright in the sky and, treading the strand where it is firm and wave-lapped, has covered the irregular, two-mile-long shore line in ample time to arrive for the market's festive opening at five A.M. Even then it is still dark, but there are electric lights in the metropolis of Papeete and they shine down every morning on half the island population.

Some have come, not two, but twenty or thirty miles - from Faaa, Punaauia, Paea, Papera or the Isthmus of Taravao. They have traveled afoot, on bicycles, trucks or camionettes. Many began the journey the evening before in battered carts drawn by chin, slowly ambling nags which plodded through the entire night with a dimly smoking lantern dangling from an axle to cast fitful shadow on the pocked roadbed below and on the converging palm fronds overhead. But whether their homes are near or far, all have arrived before the market gates are swung open, and to this extent Teuru, also, is punctual. In fact, it is said that she displays remarkable agility in slipping through before all others to snap up the fattest fish, the most luscious crabs, mangoes, fei or whatever thing her fancy may have lighted upon. Her entire marketing is in this manner accomplished in the space of five minutes and her wicker basket is filled to the brim, overflowing with the island's abundance. Yet return to Pirae and the hungry popaa is thus nowise hastened. The truly important things still remain to be done. For it must be understood that Tahiti's market is primarily a social event. Here, in the crowded lanes between the block-long tables of the fish vendors which groan beneath a rainbow

colored burden, between the forests of pendant banana and fei stalks, the swinging nets of green-skinned oranges, the clustered limes, mangoes and papayas - here the latest island gossip is exchanged. Was a daughter born to Marau of the village of Tautira? From the market place the happy tidings spread to the farthest district, the most sequestered valley. Popoti has a new lover? An excited group will gather round the bearer of such interesting information and will not leave to spread it abroad till the last detail is known. A white man come by the last boat was seen bowing down before the stone idols in front of the museum? A queer thing! - and well worth repeating. The market has no walls, but a roof of corrugated iron covers the entire square, makes a sounding-board to catch the hubbub of talk, of exclamations and laughter, sending it all back upon the heads of the gay, brown-skinned throng, redoubling the volume so that all consistently and progressively raise higher and higher their voices in competition with the echo of themselves.

When light is in the streets of the town the crowd about the depleted stalls of the marché begins to thin. A few start sensibly back for their homes or stop, perhaps, at a Chinese coffee shop for a bowl of the thick, black brew. But the largest segment of the populace is drawn irresistibly to a lurid, red-painted structure on the outer walls of which an unknown muralist has depicted a pair of lissom vahines in the throes of the hula. Here, too, there is coffee - and other beverages besides. More important still, there is music. It is the world famous Quinn's cabaret. Business is brisk in the hour when the tropic dawn is breaking, for what is more natural than that the man who has just sold a brace of fowls for twenty francs each, or a girl who has disposed of two strings of mountain oranges for a similar price, should gravitate toward the cheerful thumping of guitars, the pleasant clinking of glasses and the shuffle of bare dancing feet? What more natural, also, than that Teuru, having carefully saved a third of the market money given her the night before, should push into the fearfully congested place to squeeze with friends into one of the bamboo booths that line the wall and seat herself at the green table on which are big, white, prettily painted flowers?

"Take your swim, Monsieur Beel," Tavae advised. "Time will pass and Teuru will come."

After casting another glance down the brightening and still deserted strand I went to do so.

## III. *Adrift on Pirae Lagoon*

THE WATERS that cling to the coasts of California, of southern France, Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, and Japan have each, it seems to me, a particular beauty of their own. Yet none hold a swimmer in quite the same cool but soft embrace as do those circling the islands of French Oceania; none impart the same sense of utter freedom, causing a man to feel that he moves within his native element. No other sea erases. similarly all trace of care, leaving the patina of the mind freshly glowing, clean-washed as the wetly shining strip of sand that the last wave has whitely, smoothly brushed. And no other clasps the body like liquid, palpably caressive, air.

Tavae stayed beside his canoe, and I slipped into the lagoon, swam out a hundred yards from shore, then turned to rest with hands clasped behind my head. So, face up on the breast of Pirae Bay, one finds all of high Tahiti in his eyes. Beholding it once more, I found myself thinking of a letter I had recently received from one of a pair of famous authors who have lived here twenty years. "When I am back," he had written from temporary exile, "it will take a six-ton block-buster to pry me loose again." And I remembered having once seen this same master of English prose, when confronted with something of especial loveliness, appear at a loss for words. After moments of silent struggle, a single quiet syllable came from his lips. "Gee!" he said. Floating there, gently lifted by the slow passing swells, it was easy to sympathize with his longing to return, his determination then steadfastly to remain. And if no sound came from my own lips it was simply because I have never learned to inject the feeling into the word "gee" that has my writer friend.

From whatever vantage point it may be seen, Tahiti gives the impression, not of towering inanimate matter, not of firmly anchored soil with old volcanoes for a crown, but rather of something whimsically changing, mood-filled, volatile as life. Ancient myth tells us Tahiti was once upon a time a flsh - a notion tending to show that the warrior race who first set foot upon its beaches suspected the place to which they came to be quick, to stir and

breathe.

If one lies upon the rising and falling surface of the lagoon, the suspicion of a living island rums to certainty. Half a mile away on either hand the seaward-reaching peninsulas which define the bay tip up - pause - and slant down again. The gray, tapering boles of the coco palms crowding in the foreground begin among themselves a game of hide and seek. Those nearest the water's edge, unable to forget their dignity and grace, move only slightly and at deliberately leisured pace, but their more distant brothers, careless of an ocean-couched watcher, are happily abandoned in their sudden shiftings right and left. Even the broad-roofed house which I had tried most solidly to root, experiments with different stations. But as eyes reach farther upward these trifling beach-side antics are forgotten and in their place the mounting tiers of green-clothed hills arise. One above the other they climb to gain the steeply tilted tablelands which in their own turn drive against the massive bases of the central, sky-drawn mountains. A hill crest on which stands a single, denuded, storm-mutilated palm may at one moment appear near and clear, at the next shrouded and removed; a valley crowded with fruit-heavy trees, at one instant so proximate and distinct that the glossy-skinned oranges themselves are visible, is a moment later filled with twilight and become part of a hazy distance. Thus, while they sail across it, Tahiti responds to the tempers which the clouds by their capricious division of light and shadow impose-brightening and advancing, fading and retreating, pushing blue peaks upward in the sun, withdrawing the same pinnacles when they are briefly turned to gray. Who shall ever tire of such a pageant? And who, beholding it, can fail to sense the everlasting wonder, the timeless loveliness and grandeur of this castellated island which is Polynesia's heart?

It is hard to conceive what effect the sight of Tahiti may have had upon the Stone Age tribes who discovered it. But judging from their chants and legends they were an imaginative, poetic people and it seems unlikely that their awe and amazement in the face of such beauty can have been less than a modern man in this day experiences. Whether they brought with them the gods who ruled for a thousand years in the new homeland or found them awaiting their arrival it is impossible to say, but one suspects it must have been the latter. For echoes of the fame of Tu, Taroa and great Oro are heard only in the island world, and it is difficult, furthermore, to imagine these deities in any other clime. Rather, it seems they muse have sprung from these very shores and cliffs and crags, from these same clouds which the trades lightly carry, these seas which lapped their ancient temples. And though the temples are now destroyed, the idols toppled from their pedestals, the spirit-beings for which they stood have declined to leave so fair a land. Despite the denials of the little folk of missions they still hover on the majestic mountain known as Orofena. still audibly whisper on the night winds and in the ears and minds of brown-skinned men and women. The power of all seeing Tu is in abeyance, to be sure; but can an immortal die? As for the goddess Hina, she

sits as usual beneath a banyan growing on the moon.

By the time Teuru appeared I was outstretched on the beach, at work upon a fresh coat of tan. I had been watching her from a distance, walking with the natural poise - and total lack of haste - of her people, and twice I had sat up to make motions such as we do in America when we wave goodby. In Tahiti the gesture is supposed to mean "come quickly." The girl raised an arm in acknowledgment but, seeing that her pace did not alter in the slightest, I lay down and did not again raise my head till I heard Tavae delivering the message about the popaa being angry. Then, when their mirth had sub sided, I got up and walked over co the canoe beside which they stood.

"There is no cause for annoyance," Teuru said pleasantly, before I could speak. "Only a moment I have stopped on the way and now I go directly to make Monsieur's coffee."

"You have been at Quinn's," I said accusingly.

"But certainly." Her eyes were innocently wide. "For one little apéritif."

"For three," Tavae corrected.

"Yes, for three."

"Do you know what time it is?" I asked.

"Clearly it is morning."

"Oh, gosh."

"What is that thing 'gosh'?"

"A bad word."

An injured expression appeared on the girl's smoothly brown face and her full lips pouted slightly. "You have no reason to use bad words. Why do you do it?"

"Because you are slow, slow as a crab that mounts a coconut."

Evidently feeling that if breakfast were further delayed it was no one's fault but my own, Teuru lowered the market basket into the beached canoe and seated herself on the gunwale. "Now you have said an untruth," she pronounced seriously. "I am not like the crab." She glanced at Tavae and then back to me. "But if Monsieur Beel would put wings to my feet it is easily done."

"Then let's do it," I exclaimed fervently. "Tell me how."

"Shall I say it now, Tavae?" she asked of her brother. "Or shall I wait for a time when he smiles?"

Tavae fell into deep thought which is, for him, something of a strain. His handsome brow furrowed and for a full minute, with his eyes resting on the outrigger, he quietly scratched his navel. "I think I should say it now," he decided at last, "now while the hunger is still big within him."

"Very well." Teuru turned to face me squarely. She was wearing her hair on that morning in two long braids which fell forward on her breast and now she tossed them back and looked at me with large, imploring eyes. She took my hand in hers. "You will do this beautiful thing, mon cher Beel - yes?"

Tardily I took thought to caution. "That depends .. ."

"You will do it," she hurried on, "and always, always Tavae and I will serve you, sweeping your house and gathering flowers and cutting the grass and catching your fish and cooking them and ... "

"And the coffee?" I smiled.

"That too! Even when you are an unpleasant old man we shall serve you lovingly. Always when we bathe and dry and polish and fondle it, we shall think of you - especially if it be red and white. All the time the little bell will ring and, hearing the music passing, people will say 'It is Teuru with papa Beel's marketing; how early she is!' or else, 'It is Tavae; what a big load of copra he carries!' Another will say, 'How fortunate is the popaa to have two such friends who work and care for him so, rubbing him every day with sweet coconut oil, washing his clothes, laughing when he wishes to be gay or weeping when he wishes to be sad.' And it will all be true!"

Teuru stopped out of breath, with eyes now shining and, seeing that she was quite overcome and unable to go on, I looked to her brother. "What is she talking about, Tavae?"

He hesitated only briefly. "A bicycle," he said softly.

"Red and white," Teuru murmured.

## IV. *L'Affaire Bicyclette*

I WAS NOT so ingenuous as to imagine that any great change would be brought about by the mere addition of a bicycle, of whatever color, to our menage and I foresaw, even as Teuru and Tavae remained waiting in mutely appealing expectancy for my next words, that any saving in marketward travel time which might result would inevitably benefit Quinn's establishment rather than my own. Four apéritifs, instead of three, would doubtless then begin the day. Nor was I particularly impressed by the vision of Tavae wheeling to town with the copra crop balanced on the handlebars. He is a good worker, yet once arrived in the streets of Papeete he rarely finds his way back the same day. Nothing, then, was to be gained with a bicycle.

But in Tahiti one does not weigh pros and cons with an eye to practicality or to wisdom or convenience, and if there be any guiding principle (a fact I often doubt) it must be: what will prove most fun? I had only to look into the two pairs of eyes before me to discover that nothing in all the world could be quite as much fun as a bicycle painted red and white, and in buying one I expected nothing more. This was, it developed, a very limited and gravely mistaken expectation. For, although there was to be fun aplenty, there came heartbreak, too, and I am thankful that the foresight with which I only just now credited myself fell short by far of guessing the tragedy toward which we all three moved.

If someone had at that moment whispered in my ear was to be the brief, gay career of the bicycle and what was to be its lurid tempestuous end, I could not possibly have belived him. It would have struck me as fantastic and incredible; grown people, I should have said, could not conceivably act in such a way. And right there my ignorance would a exposed, for it was not with "grown people" in sense in which we use the phrase that I had here to deal. Teuru and Tavae possessed bodies beautifully and perfectly mature, but it was to take the bicycle incident - and many another besides - to bring home the fact that children dwelt within them. No doubt a more thoughtful observer

would have sensed in the very affection they lavished on the shining thing of nickel and enamel fertile soil from which disaster and sorrow as intense might spring. Yet, though I noted it with what I fear must have been rather complacent and superior amusement, I was far from such suspicion. Our bicycle was grealy loved - there is no other word for it - loved as if it were a living creature like Beau the cat, or Pani the dog, or Koni-koni the solitary duck. It was put to sleep at night in a shack thatch that covered the pit of rounded stones which was the native oven; it was awakened in the mornings to be bathe and dried and polished. Its moods and tempers were discuss as if they were volatile and changeable as those of its owners.

"The bicycle is happy this morning," Teuru would say "It ran so swiftly to market that both the flowers were blown from my hair."

Or another day it might be, "The bicycle is not well, Monsieur Beel. Twice coming from town I have stopped to it let rest and still it is tired." On such occasions I would go out and by putting a drop of oil here and there upon our steed's joints generally bring about quick recovery.

Of course there were times when the business of healing was more complicated, as when thorns entered a tire and produced a flat. This happened when Teuru was bowling along about midway between Pirae and Papeete. She dismounted, and tenderly gathering the injured bike in her arms, trudged the mile and a half back to deposit it at my feet. "It has lost its breath," she explained solicitously.

During the entire three months of its existence only one incident marred the otherwise touching affection with which Teuru and Tavae watched over the health and well-being of their red and white machine, and that was of a minor nature. It was on a peculiarly sultry afternoon when the usually reliable trades had faltered, then ceased altogether. For more than an hour, with the dogged persistence of a Northerner, I had been seated before the typewriter and had, in all that time, produced nothing save perspiration. It was in the nature of a relief, therefore, when, from behind the house, Tavae's and Teuru's voices were suddenly raised loud and disputatious, thus giving me an excuse to desert my fruitless attendance on the muse and to go and see what was the matter. I found them standing over the bicycle, which was prone upon the grass. Tavae had wrapped his hand firmly in his sister's hair and without great effort was holding her at a distance such that the windmill movements of her arms left him largely unharmed. They were calling each other names.

"Stop it" I said. "How do you think I can work in all this noise? And if I do not work there will be no money; and if there is no money there will be nothing to eat." This was only a manner of speaking; even if I did not work and even if there was no money there would probably always be something to eat.

Tavae let go and Teuru stooped quickly to pick up the fallen wheel. She passed a hand over the fenders, over the saddle, she tried the bell, all the time murmuring, "Ah, la pauvre petite, la pauvre petite!"

"What's the matter with it?" I asked.

She pointed an accusing finger. "He has done it a hurt."

"A what?"

"Aue! He gave it a blow of the foot."

"Tavae," I said more in amazement, I think, than sternly, "did you do such a thing?"

The gaze of my trusty man of all work was downcast, apparently fixed upon a small excavation which, by twisting bare toes this way and that, he was making in the lawn. He did not reply.

"I am speaking to you, Tavae. Did you kick the bicycle?"

Finally he lifted sorrow-filled eyes. "Yes," he confessed, small one I gave it."

"You must have been drinking."

"No, no - not at all."

"Then what on earth were you thinking of?"

"The bicycle behaved very badly, Monsieur Beel. When commanded it to go, it refused; when I worked fast with legs, it stood still."

I looked from Tavae to the stubborn bike. The chain had slipped off the sprocket and I stooped to fix it.

This little scene should have prepared me, to some extent least, for the final denouement of l'affaire bicyclette. But, the other hand, it is unlikely that anyone watching Teuru caress the thing while she whispered terms of endearment should have guessed that on a beautiful, clear Sunday not distant the tune would change with amazing swiftness from "poor little one" to "evil one, wicked one."

Sunday is a very special day in Tahiti. The town market on that morning is the most gala, the most crowded both to produce and shoppers. Quinn's cabaret is then, during the gray early hours, the most feverishly, hilariously busy..... by which I do not mean to suggest that apéritifs were responsible for what happened on the particular fateful Sunday of which I am about to speak; they may not have been, because Teuru negotiated the road back from town without mishap. She safely deposited in the icebox the things which later in the day she would place on the table, and then went home to prepare herself for church. Such preparation was invariably elaborate and consumed several hours, so that when she finally emerged in her snow-white hat finely woven by the women of distant Manihiki, wearing her new and equally white dress of airy organdy, freshly bathed and perfumed with the scent of flowers crushed in coconut oil, it would seem that whatever effect the visit to Quinn's may have had on her ought to have been largely dissipated. I am trying my best to absolve her of blame and to place it upon the bicycle, which she then led out of its shelter and - all unconscious of the malevolent design which the ungrateful mechanical contrivance must have been harboring - mounted it and set off toward the prayer-house.

Teuru is possessed of very real beauty but, to an outlander, it is most

apparent on the ordinary weekdays when her only garment is the simple native wrap-around, the pareu. At such times, in such garb, she, like her sisters, is utterly thoughtless of self and this, too, heightens her innate loveliness. It is, therefore, sad and disconcerting to see such a supple, sloe eyed beauty suddenly, upon the Lord's day, transformed and - by hiding the perfect body beneath a silly, flouncy frock, by cramming the wide, solidly supporting feet into high heeled shoes from France - become ridiculous. Still more sad, perhaps, is the simpering air of satisfaction that generally accompanies these togs. "Just look," she appears coyly to announce. "Am I not a veritable belle?" It would, of course, distress her greatly to think the answer was a violent "no." But the Sunday rig is not intended to impress a queer-notioned white man. Rather its purpose is alone to attract the attention of Tahitians and that, I must admit, it most successfully does. Other girls will stare in admiration, will envy the sheerness of the muslin, the sheen of the wide blue sash, the remarkable holes at the slippers' tips where stub toes are stoically compressed, the useless, gauzy handkerchief tucked beneath a shell bracelet at the wrist. If Teuru's leisurely progress along the little lane stirs here and there a jealous pang, it gives rise as well to many a comment and exclamation - and these strike very pleasantly on her ears. With the studied carelessness an accomplished rider she guides the wheel by a single hand among the straggling, church-bound throng, gracefully avoiding the scampering children, slipping between the elder, broad-bosomed females in their trailing mother-hubbard grazing the men whose white coats are tightly button over their naked chests, while with the other hand she touches the flaming hibiscus blossom at her temple or smooths cloud-like stuff of the dress before her. For everyone she a smile and a cheerful word, yet it is on the girls who have sought - with less success - to bedeck themselves in manner similar to Teuru's own that the smile falls most dazzlingly the greeting most animatedly.

"Mea maitai, Jeanne? - are you a good thing today? What pretty material you wear; everyone seems to like it. I see that Titi and Rori and Hélène have just the same."

Or, a little farther on, "Mara! You look so sweet in that cloth from Ah You's; no one would ever guess he'd had lower the price to five francs the meter."

Affably casting such little gems to right and left Teuru, on this long-remembered Sunday, came abreast at last of the small, tin-roofed structure which is the Protestant church our district. It stands back a short distance in the cool shade of old trees and is reached by way of a short bridge weathered planks spanning the drainage ditch that parallels the road. A considerable number of the congregation were already loitering without, and among them was our tall and handsome native pastor who, at that minute, chanced to look up and see the organdy-clad cyclist about to turn in to his temple.

"Ah," he exclaimed in hearty appreciation, "qu'elle est mignonne, cette

Teuru!"

Presumably any young woman, Polynesian or otherwise, enjoys being called darling. But (and this is simply my own theory) the effect upon Teuru would seem to have been overwhelming. Possibly the face that the sweet word fell from the well-shaped lips of no less a man than the pastor had some thing to do with it. In any case, with the condescendingly gracious air of a grande dame, Teuru guided the bicycle off the bridge where it sailed in a brief arc through the air and then plummeted, with herself - so the witnesses insist - still benignly smiling upon the saddle, into the ditch below. There were, in this ditch, about six inches of stagnant green water plus a quantity of very soft mud and, rather curiously, having landed in it at full length she made no move to arise again. There were no tears at this stage of the proceedings and, although the smile had disappeared, I gather that her face was as blankly expressionless as only a Tahitian's may at times become. She simply lay there while the beautiful Manihiki hat drifted slowly, dispiritedly seawards, while the sensation-making dress drank its fill, while the French shoes sank deeper and deeper in the receptive mire.

The pastor and several of the church elders rolled up their trousers. Gingerly they made their way down the steep bank and fished out first the bicycle, the front wheel of which had assumed an egg shape, and then Teuru.

Even there at the very threshold of the church I am afraid there was, after the first moment of surprise and horror had passed, a certain amount of laughter. But undoubtedly the hardest ordeal of all was the retreat homeward upon which, with the bicycle held high, Teuru then set out. Yet everyone reports that as she marched down the center of the road, passing Jeanne and Mara and Rori and all the others she'd so recently, blithely left behind, there was a fixed and faraway look in her eyes as if already she had formed her terrible resolve and gazed into an abyss still more black than the mud which covered her from head to foot. So it may be that if there were smiles she did not see them, that if there was laughter - if one little vixen ran beside her yelling, "Ah, qu'elle est mignonne, cette Teuru!" - she did not hear.

Most often when anything of significance happens I am asleep or arrive on the scene just too late or fail till several days have passed to recognize the occurrence as either important or interesting. It is not surprising, then, that on this eventful Sabbath I was too late to do or prevent anything. My nose was buried in a book when the smell of smoke reached it. Some people, I know, would immediately have got up to look into corners or under beds but, possibly because I am fond of the smell of smoke whether it comes from burning leaves or fagots or what not, I made no move. Besides, smoke is usually produced intentionally and for some legitimate reason. But a doubt entered my mind when I later caught the less pleasing odor of burning rubber. Making loud sniffing noises I put my head in the bedroom, the bath, the closets; finally I walked to the kitchen. Everywhere it seemed equally strong. I was gazing at the kerosene stove, which was in no way misbehaving, when

piteous wails of lamentation rent the air and caused me to glance quickly into the backyard. Framed by the open doorway was an arresting picture.

In a corner at the inland extremity of the property, Tavae had for many weeks been assembling the dead fronds fallen from our coconut trees, and I had noted only the day before that he had built up an imposing mound more than twenty feet high. Probably the sight of lurid flames roaring from this pyre into the blue sky would in itself have struck me as strange, because it was unlikely that my man should have chosen Sunday to set off his fireworks, but I saw that Tavae was nowhere in evidence and that it was Teuru alone whose body was limned against the conflagration. Moreover, I could have sworn that she was stark naked. Certain of ancient Polynesia's rituals were amazing enough, but neither from musty and yellowed records nor from the oldest living natives had I ever learned of anything fantastic as the scene which was now, upon a modern Christian Sunday, unfolding in my own back yard. Like a voluptuary high priestess gripped in hypnotic frenzy by some old magic thought dead and here reborn, the girl who customarily waited so demurely at my table, who daily calmly washed the dishes and swept the floors and fried the fish, whirled in an unbelievably abandoned dance about the burning fronds. Often I had seen Teuru amusing herself and her friends with the island hula, but never had I witnessed contortions such as her brown body wove before the leaping flames, and never in all my days upon Tahiti had I heard such heart-rending "Aue's!" as came continually from her lips.

Although human sacrifices in plenty were once stretched upon this island's now fallen altars, they died beneath the razor-sharp bamboo knife of a feather-bedecked servant of the gods, and not by cleansing flame. Of this fact I was well aware, yet as I approached I could not put aside the feeling that it was a sacrificial pyre which licked the highest fronds of tall surrounding palms and that the nude, apparently demented girl was re-enacting some orgiastic fire-dance from the forgotten past. It might, I suppose, have occurred to someone more analytically minded that the periodic sweeping gestures with which Teuru scooped up handfuls of earth to pour upon her wildly disheveled hair were not in character with an otherwise thoroughly pagan and idolatrous performance, and that this expression of grief stemmed directly from the Old Testament, with which every Tahitian is intimately familiar. But not until I was very near did I discover that Teuru was in fact fully clothed, not only by her fine organdy but by a superimposed film of mud which molded the dress skin-tight about her. My mistake in thinking her to have disrobed was only natural, for Teuru is herself very nearly the color of the island earth, but perception of the true state of affairs - coupled, perhaps, with a degree of disappointment - jolted me quickly back to reality.

I waited till in her distracted circlings she came close. "Teu ru!" I said sharply.

Unheeding, as if I were no more than another of the motionless and uninterested palm boles, she gyrated past. On her next tour I grabbed and spun

her abruptly round to face me. The dance ceased and the wails, too, but for a full minute she stared at me uncomprehendingly. "Snap out of it!" I exclaimed and although, confused and alarmed, I'd used English words, the glassy, trance-like look faded from her eyes and recognition took its place. "Name of God," I said, relapsing into French, "what are you doing?"

For some while still she seemed unable to speak, but tears started slowly down her cheeks making furrows in the silt. She allowed herself to be led away and we had covered half the distance to the house when she dissolved in a heap upon the grass.

"I shall die, mon cher Beel," she sobbed. "Right away I shall die."

Tears, even unreasonable and foolish ones, leave me in a very pliable condition. "I should not like to see you do such a thing, Teuru," I said truthfully. "And this is no place to think of it. Madame Ducet is looking at us even now." It was a fact that the nearest neighbor, a woman of insatiable curiosity, had come as far as the separating hedge of false coffee and flowers which lay between our properties and was interestedly peering through the leaves.

But Teuru was beyond such concerns. "Of what use is it longer to live? How should I wish to live when the bicycle is gone. Aue! - gone, all gone!"

It will be thought that I was incredibly slow in understanding, and so I was. "Gone? Where has it got to?"

Teuru's eyes roved to the splendid bonfire and following them with my own I made out the redly glowing skeleton of our temperamental bike lying in the midst of the crackling fronds. "Is that....?" I began aghast. "Did you....?"

Miserably she nodded. "The bicycle was wicked. Ah, how wicked it was! Before the pastor it placed me with my pretty dress in dirty water. I was filled full of anger and I have done a cruel, a terrible thing. Oh, dear, oh, dear - ah, me - aue! Now the anger is gone and I am empty; now the poor, unfortunate little wheel-for-foot-pushing is gone and I am alone and there will never be another." At the end of this speech she fell forward with her face buried in the soft grass. An appreciable time passed during which I was trying to decide what to do or say, whether to be annoyed or sad or amused, or perhaps all three. Then Teuru raised herself and wiped her eyes with the back of a hand. "It is possible," she remarked tentatively, and in a tone of voice now quietly controlled, "It is possible, Monsieur Beel, that if there is one day another bicycle I should not die. . . ."

A time did of course eventually arrive when a second wheel took its place in our establishment. Nothing disgraceful has yet befallen; perhaps it will continue into a normal and unexciting old age.

But on the day of which I was speaking when these rather painful memories led me astray, Tavae and Teuru were waiting breathlessly for the fateful words which should determine whether the first of our bicycles was to be or not to be.

"We will go to Ah You's store," I pronounced at last, "and we shall buy it

and it will be red and white!"

Promptly they both fell upon me to plant a great number of warm kisses on either side of my nose, then - in mutual congratulation - did the same thing to each other. We were all deeply moved to discover that I was such a good, kind and simple-minded person.

## V. *South Sea Trade*

THE PASSION for flowers is common to every Tahitian, man or woman. But in the girl who cares for my lagoon-side house of bamboo this feeling is carried to something of an extreme. I have tried to remember a time when there were not blossoms in Teuru's hair and cannot think of a one. The days are few when, sometime between dawn and dark, she is not happily engaged in sprinkling or weeding or pruning the flowers which crowd about the house, or in planting still others along the winding driveway or on the borders of the property. Brother Tavae is not allowed to interfere, for there must be a division of such pleasant tasks: the gently sloping lawns are his allotment and it is understood that no one but himself shall touch the complicated lawn mower, which is strictly a man's affair.

The flower crop will never be too large because the demands upon it are heavy. The big, darkly polished bowl of miru wood which stands in the center of the dining table, the tall urn carved from tamanu with three supporting idols which stands on the bookcase, the many smaller containers of native wood or shell or Chinese porcelain that are scattered here and there throughout the house - all must be filled daily. The garden must also meet the requirements of the feast and celebrations, both those that are planned and foreseen and those that just happen spontaneously, suddenly, without warning. At such times Teuru will seat herself with a friend or two upon a mat placed in the shade of a tamanu tree and with a great mound of blooms between them, they will spend the entire day designing and threading garlands for the guests.

I have always enjoyed living in the tropic profusion of Teuru's flowers, but it sometimes strikes me as curious that because of them one of my nearest neighbors and I have not been on speaking terms for more than three years. Probably we should never in any case have had much to say to each other but, as it is, there has been not so much as a "Bon jour," and if I chance tomorrow to meet Madame Ducet on the beach or road, her thin face will wear the same expression of outrage and distaste that I first saw long ago when I found the

lady and Teuru tossing angry words back and forth across the boundary line. Madame Ducet was alternating between excellent French and English, and Teuru was spiritedly replying in equally abusive Tahitian. But whereas madame (either because of her years, which must be fifty-odd, or simply because of lack of imagination) confined herself to speech alone. Teuru energetically punctuated her remarks by casting stones at the Ducet hens which scurried frantically about in the back ground.

"Ah, monsieur!" cried Madame Ducet when she saw me approaching. "You must stop this wicked girl. The things she says are not to be borne."

Teuru turned to me with eyes that blazed. She stretched out an arm and pointed. "Look at her!" she demanded.

I did so and beheld only what I had seen without interest often enough before. Marie Ducet had ceased to be anything to look at a second time before my advent on the island. Once, to be sure, it is said that it was otherwise and that her lovers included an Italian count. But such things were long past - which may in part explain her antipathy for young women in any degree attractive. As she stood there, skinny arms hugged close to her flat chest, it was clear that she did not at all like the Tahitian girl.

"She does not bathe," Teuru stated flatly.

The lady sniffed disdainfully at such an absurd suggestion.

"She has the odor of very old fish," Teuru elaborated. "One must be thankful that her house is under the wind."

"Quelle menteuse!" shrilled madame. "How can you permit such a creature to work for you, monsieur? Do you not know that she has neither truth nor morals? As soon as it is dark she is on the beach with a man. Do you never hear the laughter and the singing and then the silence and then the singing again? It is a fine scandal she makes in our district one night with a native, another time a sailor of France or England or Spain, or again an American, a Hindu or a coal black man of Martinique. Ah, mon Dieu," she finished quite breathless, "c'est une voluprueuse!"

Teuru drew herself up. "I have never been with a Martiniquais! You see, Monsieur Beel, she is jealous, this woman. She is no longer pleased that the girls of Pirae are desired. She would wish everyone dried and useless like herself. She does not like pretty things. It is for *that* she has cut down all the flowers I planted between her land and ours!"

I had been vaguely aware that in some way the landscape about us was changed, but at Teuru's words I looked first seaward, then inland, and discovered with pain and surprise that the long rows of lilies and hibiscus had indeed been lopped off close to the ground.

"They stood upon my property," the Frenchwoman said quickly, defensively.

"Upon Monsieur Beel's," Teuru contradicted.

"Not at all - mine."

"His."

"Mine!"

"Cochon!"

"Putain!"

"Merde alors!"

Unfortunately, the line supposed to divide the good earth on which I live from that of my neighbor is marked by no more than a few small and comparatively light chunks of bleached coral. Even in the daytime these markers have no air of permanence and I had long suspected that by night they often remained far from stationary. On the morning upon which the matter of the flowers arose I saw at a glance that Madame Ducet was technically correct and that the forlorn stubs of the hibiscus plants sprang from ground which appeared for the moment to be hers. This, I realized, proved nothing except that it was madame herself who had most recently labored with the porous monuments. It was, moreover, a condition which Tavae and Teuru would doubtless remedy as soon as darkness again fell upon our island. But in any case the damage was done and, although it would not have occurred to me to apply to Madame Ducet the exact terms which Teuru's fertile mind produced, I agreed with her perfectly.

"I think you have not behaved as a good neighbor, madame," I said, slipping unwittingly into the language of aggrieved diplomacy. "You might have spoken to Teuru during the weeks she was planting if you felt the flowers were not where they should be."

"Clearly," the lady replied, "monsieur is as stupid as his poule."

Teuru began to titter, which seemed to me very ill-timed and silly.

I took her arm. "Come along. There is nothing to be done."

"But there is a great deal!" she protested, immediately sobered. "I shall cut out her tongue. I shall put the bush knife in her useless opu and turn it so, and so, and so!" With wild gestures she demonstrated in just what manner she would carve, but our neighbor only smiled scornfully, secure in the knowledge that Teuru could never intentionally harm a living creature.

When I started back for the house Teuru walked beside me, turning occasionally to make faces at madame, who was doubtless screwing her own features into still more horrible contortions. Obviously, relations had suffered a strain but I never imagined that a feud was begun which would, as now seemed likely, continue till death removed one or the other of the opposing factions.

One result of this war of the good neighbors is that although Madame Ducet and I still dwell on our own lands we subsist almost entirely upon the produce of the other's. It is a clandestine trade, yet there appears to be a tacit understanding that it shall go on without interference. At the sound of rustlings in our mango tree, Teuru and Tavae do not rush out to protect my property. They move silently to the door and Peer cautiously into the night. "Ah," they will whisper happily, "it is Madame Hupipi gathering fruit!" (Hupipi is an interestung name they have given the poor woman, a name

gleefully accepted by the entire district. It means bean-wind.) The next night finds Teuru and Tavae trespassing in their turn, filling without opposition their coconut-leaf baskets. I have gathered that both sides were once abroad on the same evening, and that on the return trip they met, fully loaded, on the flexible boundary line. Each one continued on in silent dignity without so much as a sideways glance.

My staff is convinced they have the best of the bargain because they manage to carry more, and it would be futile to try to persuade them otherwise. But Madame Ducet is also content. She knows as well as I that the mangoes which grow about my house do not taste of turpentine as do hers, and that the papayas have none of the flavor of ether which is so peculiar to her own. When it comes to the hens the inequity is even more marked.

I had always imagined there was nothing so idiotic as barnyard fowls, whether fine imported birds like mine or sorry, skin-and-bones native specimens like madame's. But it seems that, even as humans, they are sometimes capable of concerted action, and this may be seen in the way the two flocks invariably forage on the neighboring estates.

The traffic in poultry takes place in broad daylight and I stumbled upon it quite by accident on a certain afternoon. I had been lying in the wicker chaise-longue with a detective book and, having come to a place in the yarn where someone opened a cold, frothing bottle of Pabst, it occurred to me to go and do likewise. The house had long been still. Imagining myself to be alone, I went to see if Teuru and Tavae might have overlooked a bottle in some corner of the icebox. On the threshold of the kitchen I stopped abruptly, as it was necessary to do if I were not to tread on the upturned rears of my two retainers. They lay at full length on the floor with their heads hanging out the back door. So intent did they seem on whatever was taking place in the yard that I promptly forgot what I had come for and, mindful of their signals for silence, tiptoed forward till I could peer over the dark heads and beyond. Five or six feet from the kitchen steps a small noose of white string lay upon the ground. It enclosed a few grains of rice and the end of the string was in Tavae's tensed, expectant hand. A single mud-colored, unbelievably scrawny hen was nervously circling the bait, jerking its foolish head this way and that, making abrupt sallies and then faint-heartedly retreating. There could have been no doubt in my mind whose was this pitiful excuse for a fowl even if I had not heard Teuru's soft, enticing whisper: "Come little Hupipi, come ... !" The bird snapped up one of the outlying white kernels, then another and another. It had come very nearly to the center of the noose when Tavae's toes curled, gripping the floor, and all three of us held our breaths. Suddenly he gave a brisk pull and the hen flew into the air with a loud squawking. It did not go far because the string was firmly wrapped about one leg. Tavae hauled in lustily hand over hand till he could reach out and restore quiet, which he did very dexterously, and permanently. Then both brother and sister sat up and looked at me with radiant faces.

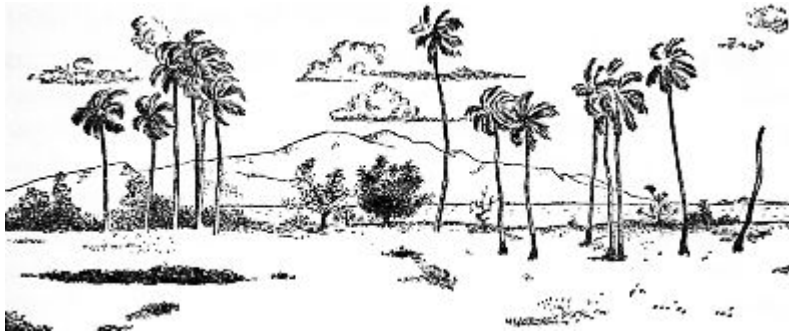
"You will have chicken for supper," said Teuru with satisfaction, as she took the limp bundle of feathers from Tavae. A faint shadow crossed her face as she felt of the thing. But she brightened almost immediately. "We will make stew she announced, "with much breadfruit so that your stomach may be filled."

"Stew!" I said bitterly, "And what will Madame Ducet be having for supper, eh?"

Before she could answer there came a sound from the direction of the Ducet house which was like an echo of those which Tavae had so recently cut short. There was a frantic flapping of wings accompanied by an alarmed crowing. An echo, I have said, but there was nothing faint about those cries of distress and I knew that they never came from the throat of a dispirited, coconut-fed native hen. No, only a pampered, full-chested Rhode Island Red reared on imported feed could produce such clarion calls. The uproar continued for some while, which was only natural because old Madame Ducet could not be expected to reel in her prize with the same alacrity as Tavae. Then silence fell. Teuru and Tavae looked at each other knowingly. Their lips compressed in freshly determined lines and they nodded their heads. Quickly Teuru reached for the bag of rice and her brother began hastily to untangle his lariat of string.

"Quelle femme!" he muttered. "Her heart is a cold stone." Then he rushed out to lay the stage for the next arrival.

After determining that someone had drunk the last bottle of beer, I went back to the living room and lying down on the couch looked out over the restful, calming expanse of lagoon and dreaming sea. Very soon the thought of thirst and hens was gone from mind.



## VI. *The Humble Coconut*

IN MY BOYHOOD, when I lived in the Marianas Islands, the rich est man on Guam was a Mr. Shimizu. Mr. Shimizu's wealth stemmed almost entirely from the humble coconut; from a perfectly unbelievable number of them. I heard it said that his trees totaled 18,069. The figure seemed to me impressive. It touched off my dreams of someday becoming exactly such an island planter. And here I am today with the stately boles of coco palms rising on all sides of the home in which I write. I am, to be sure, short some trees. There were, when I last counted them, fifty-two. But last year alone I set out sir new ones, and three nuts that someone had left lying around sprouted and took root of their own accord.

Putting aside the question of profit, coconut palms are very remarkable. The plaited fronds form the roofs which keep the rain off native heads, the baskets in which breadfruit are hauled to market, the flares by which fish are speared at night, the sails by which slim canoes are drawn across the bright lagoons. The trunks make stilts for the houses, hulls for the outriggers, idols for the tourists. Without the sauce squeezed from the white nutmeat, a Tahitian would never eat; no, every morsel of food and the fingers besides must be dipped in miti hue before moving on to the widely receptive mouths. Without the inner shell there would be no charcoal for the irons with their forward-tilted chimneys, and clothes would go unpressed; without the fibrous husk there would be neither rope, nor fuel for the boilers of the brasserie, and we should all go sober. Except for the brown, even-textured cloth which the coco palm spins about each new frond - a cloth now discarded in favor of brilliant prints from the looms of Manchester each part of this marvelous tree has its use. To all these benefits any island inhabitant feels free to help himself. The planter then makes into copra whatever nuts remain.

Copra, of course, is nothing more nor less than the sun-dried meat of the nut and constitutes our principal item of export. Just what becomes of it in the distant lands to which it goes neither I nor my native friends can exactly say. I

try, nevertheless, to keep informed, and it was only recently that I read that a resident of Sydney has succeeded in operating a deisel engine on oil pressed from copra and - significant, I should think that the machine gave off a prodigiously bad smell.

The making of the crop, and the smell, is out of my hands. Tavae and Teuru take care of everything. Aside from ordering out a demijohn of vin ordinaire from Ah You's grocery in Papeete, nothing is expected of me and I am free to sit back and watch my plantation in the actual throes of production.

When we last made copra, I heard the shrill squeals announcing Tavae's approach with the unoiled wheelbarrow early in the morning. When he rounded the house and came to the front I saw that he had bound up his pareu between his legs and that the handle of his bush knife was tucked in behind with the long blade lying flat against his muscular brown back. He was grinning widely. Teuru walked beside him with her pareu similarly arranged to form very short shorts, an additional bit of bright cloth covering her breasts, and an equally wide smile spread over her darkly beautiful face. On each head was a wreath of tender green fern.

Passing through Pirae village, Tavae would have yelled from time to time, "Chez Monsieur Beel one makes the copra!" and now the procession of people attracted by this information, and by the contents of the wheelbarrow, brought up the rear.

Tavae set down the barrow, heaved out the enormous wicker-bound jug and placed it on the ground, where an admiring circle promptly formed about it. "Ah, mon ami," he said cheerfully to me, his eyes traveling over his assembled friends, including the two who held guitars, "there will be much gaiety."

"That's fine, Tavae. And the copra - will there be much of that, too?"

He gave a casual glance at the tops of the trees. "Oh, yes," he replied easily, "a hundred kilos-two hundred - maybe more ... " He turned 'to his sister. "Will you get the glasses, Teuru, so that we may begin?"

"But yes. And if Monsieur Beel will remove his feet I will also take up the floor mats and lay them on the grass for sitting."

In very short order the mats were spread and the people comfortably disposed upon them. The guitars were tuned, the glasses filled, and about that time the sun got above the central mountains and slanted down on all the beaming brown faces. Teuru came to the door and I saw that we were about to start the thrice yearly routine.

"You must come and join the guests," she informed me.

"No," I said, "there are things to do."

"What harm is done if the machine-for-writing lies idle? Come."

The typewriter is infrequently otherwise than idle - and, clearly, no harm is done. But I shook my head, firmly determined that for once I should remain sensibly within.

Teuru smiled, and it was the superior, knowing sort of smile one uses to

wheedle a recalcitrant child. "I will bring you a glass of vin rouge." In a moment she was back with the filled tumbler. "Drink it," she said. "Drink it and become reasonable."

"It will make no difference," I assured her, "none whatever."

"Understood. But everyone waits."

Unfortunately, such was indeed the case. All eyes were turned expectantly upon us and everywhere the wine remained as yet untasted. So I arose and spoke the necessary words. "Drink, friends, and let your thoughts turn merrily!" When I had drained my glass there were the usual cries of approval and Tavae shouted louder than the rest, "Like wind mills, papa Beel, like the wings of birds our heads will turn!"

Then the people got to work, the guitarists on their instruments, the others on the wine. All the mouths opened and began to sing. It was magnificent. Surely in all the world there is no music so filled with life, so joyfully abandoned - or so loud - as that which Tahitians manage to produce, and for some while I lingered in the doorway, entranced as always, and slightly envious, too, of such complete thoughtlessness of care or copra. When the song ended amid much laughter Teuru was back at my elbow with a new glass of wine and I was obliged to make another little speech, a duty which I performed rather more easily this time and expanded to considerably more than a simple admonition to tipple.

Tavae grunted his encouragement. "We make progress, mon vieux." He patted the mat at his side in invitation, but it was not till two more songs and two more of Teuru's trips were completed that I found myself stretched out beside him on the cool pandanus with my hands clasped under my head and eyes fixed in great contentment upon a number of white clouds which were moving in leisurely fashion toward that part of the horizon where Bora Bora lies. In a comparatively short time (although not with quite the indecent haste that the telling must make it appear) I had achieved a frame of mind very similar to that of my companions. Nothing, it then seemed to me, was of the slightest importance except the touch of the trade wind which rounded the point from Cook's Bay to brush across us, the pleasantly warm sun which here and there slipped through the moving fronds overhead, the luminous green plain of the lagoon below, the dark blue mountains above - the next song, the good wine. Which is to say that in Teuru's words, I had become reasonable. So reasonable, in fact, that when first Tavae and then his sister detached themselves momentarily from the festive circle and walked each to a nearby tree, their actions failed to suggest to me any faintest connection with the prosaic business of copra-making. Rather, it was a symbolic, unhurried dance through which the perfect young bodies of my two retainers moved.

At the base of the trees they bent to bind about their ankles the restraining hobbles of tough, pliant purau bark, then sprang lightly against the gray trunks, wedging them between bare feet, clasping them above with supple arms. In unison their firm brown legs drew up till the boy and girl seemed to

sit upon their heels. Easily, effortlessly, they straightened till the entire length of their bodies pressed close against the sea ward leaning palms. Without pause, one movement flowing unbroken into the next, their legs flexed, straightened, bent again as they stroked the trees away beneath them like a pair of airborne swimmers.

I suppose it was only natural that my attention should tend to center on Teuru. Not that her ascent was more perfectly co-ordinated than her brother's, nor that her shape was more exactly what it ought to be. She has, however, the advantage of a complete set of teeth and a splendid, waist-long mane of blackest hair. From a height she turned her head and glanced down at us, the teeth flashing whitely in her dark face and the hair, caught by the boisterous trades, streaming out from wide, smooth shoulders. When she had reached the top of the tree she clung with one hand to the base of a trembling frond and with the other drew the long, slim knife. The blade flashed brightly in the sun and, one after another, the heavy coconuts began to plummet down. They struck the soft earth with solid, satisfying thuds and some remote Yankee part of my mind started to count: twenty-five centimes.... fifty centimes seventy-five....one franc.... But soon they were coming in a shower and there was no keeping track even if one had so foolish a desire. And at the moment I had wit enough to realize that if we were garnering francs and centimes it was only very incidental, that our real aim was not the production of copra but of an animated tableau, of conviviality, pleasant talk and laughter. So thinking, it was possible to remain supine, utterly careless, lost in admiration of the two Tahitians who swung so lightly, so joyously back and forth against the idly drifting clouds. When, later, they returned to earth and the wicker jug, others took their places some climbing the trees, some splitting the fallen nuts and laying them open to the sun, some scooping out the meats with short, curved knives, but leaving always the great majority occupied with celebration.

In this manner the entire harvest was gathered without in convenience to anyone, almost without awareness of its being done. Yet it was no haphazard affair, for the slicing of the last nut coincided exactly with the draining of the last ruby-colored drop from the demijohn. After we had shaken hands all around and told each other that it was a fine party, the guests strolled off to their homes and I went in to seat myself again in the now quiet house. Could Shimizu's copra-making have been like this, I wondered? Could that astute, sly Japanese have managed his business with such ease and graciousness as I had again shown myself to do? It seemed unlikely at the time.

And two days later when Tavae and Teuru returned from Papeete in the tombereau I was brought near to certainty that neither in Guam nor anywhere else could there be a plantation quite like mine. The tombereau is a decrepit, high-sided cart with two roughly spherical wheels - a model formerly employed for transporting people to guillotines - which we are in the habit of hiring whenever there is freight to be hauled. Early in the morning Tavae and his sister had crammed all the copra into huge burlap sacks, heaved them into

the shuddering vehicle, and set off for town. When, toward evening, the empty tumbril creaked up to the door they jumped out and came to stand beside my desk.

Carefully Tavae placed two soiled five franc notes before me. "Voil!" he said cheerfully.

I picked them up, folded them different ways, and listened to his report.

"The copra," he announced, "we have sold to the Etablissements Donald for eight hundred francs."

"And to the sacré chinois," Teuru added, "we have paid seven hundred for the wine."

"Yes?" I said pleasantly, looking into their complacent faces.

"Yes," they replied.

There appeared to be a discrepancy. After waiting a while I asked about the missing ninety.

"B'en, what would you?" Tavae laid an affectionate hand upon my shoulder. "We passed by the cabaret .... "

"Very briefly," Teuru amended.

"But of course." I put the money in my pocket.

Teuru cleared her throat. "There is still the little matter of the tombereau," she said softly, "a question of forty francs."

"Oh." We gazed at each other, smiling amiably. "Then we have again made the crop for less than nothing."

"Ah, no, Monsieur Beel!" Teuru protested quickly.

"Do not say it," Tavae implored. "Not for nothing! Was there not a big happiness?"

I can never think of an answer to that one. It is undeniably true.

## VII. *God and the Washbasin*

WHENEVER a visitor appears with a letter of introduction from friends in America I am almost always very glad. If such a newly come guest looks about the house with interest and appreciation I am ready to decide then and there that he or she is a truly delightful person. I felt this way toward Mrs. Winship while she was exclaiming about the pandanus roof, the furnishings, the Mordvinoff paintings; but the feeling did not last. To have allowed myself even momentary satisfaction in the polite words which she dropped in such profusion was really unreasonable, because I'd immediately sensed she was of a sort who could not possibly approve of Tahiti and its inhabitants, native or imported. She should have remained in Boston, where the bird's-nest hat would have looked right, where her seat at the symphony waited for her year after year, where she properly belonged. It had also been a mistake for her to allow someone to drop a wreath of flowers about her thin and aging throat: the flowers did not appear at home there and they gave her a false air of frivolity to which she seemed, unconsciously perhaps, to be trying to play up. But when she asked with forced brightness, "And who built this quaint little house for you?" I had, although the house is neither quaint nor very small, no intention to offend.

"Why, God built it, Mrs. Winship," I said innocently.

"Indeed?" Eyebrows arched, she gave me a quick glance, and it was this look, I believe, which caused me childishly to refrain from further explanation. Her eyes said very plainly, "Well! what can be expected of a man who lives in such an odd place and manner. More than a little mad of course."

"Yes," I continued, now deliberately perverse, "he did it all in six weeks and spent the seventh in hilarious debauch. He might have finished in five if it hadn't been for the lavabo."

"The.....?"

"The washbasin, you know. God had a perfect devil of a time with the washbasin."

Mrs. Winship gave a small, nervous smile and remembered that the cruise ship was sailing that very afternoon. She really must be going. She went out to the car which had brought her from town, awakened the driver by tapping with her parasol on a pair of bare feet which dangled over the front door, and by the time Teuru appeared from the kitchen with the tea tray the entire equipage was disappearing around the comer of the house.

"Lala," said Teuru. "Monsieur's guest is so quickly gone?"

"Madame has gone," I told her with a comfortable sigh, "and we shall never see her again as long as we live."

Tiens. Is it true?"

"Yes. Put the tisane here; I'll have it by myself."

She placed the tray beside me and I poured a little of the hot water flavored with leaves from our orange tree into one of the fragile cups. "Tell me, Teuru. How did a big ape like Atua ever get such a name? It means God, doesn't it?"

"But certainly. And who should have given it to him but his mother? It is a good name, Monsieur Beel, and besides Atua is not an ape; he is, as you very well know, the best carpenter in our district."

Teuru waited for me to say something more, and as I did not do so she left and I continued to sip the hot tisne, bending over now and then to slap a mosquito on my ankles. Although there was no clock in the house except one which none of us ever thought to wind, I imagined that because of the dead calm on the lagoon and the utter stillness in the palm fronds, it must be about five - the hour when the trades regularly give up for the day. It was the laziest of all Tahitian hours, one in which it was inadvisable to do anything other than sit. By six the cool mountain down-draft called hupe would begin and then one would be moved to take a shower and prepare for whatever the delicious evening might hold. But for the present it was sufficient to drink the perfumed hot water and allow the thoughts to wander. They kept drifting back to God - to homely, stocky, hard-working, middle-aged Atua.

I don't know what I should do without him. Although he not a permanent fixture about the place as are Tavae and Teuru, he is constantly on call for odd jobs of every kind and for minor and major emergencies. Atua is especially remarkable for two things, his abilities as a handy man and his temper. He is carpenter, plumber, cement-layer, electrician, mechanic, wood-carver, canoe-builder, cesspool-digger and general Mr. Fix-it all rolled into one. He rarely does anything quite correctly the first time but he stands behind his work, as witness the case of the small beach-side pavilion which he built for M. Brichot, and then twice rebuilt after it had fallen down first because someone leaned his chair against one of the uprights, and then again because of a brief and not very vigorous squall which came mn from the sea. Atua always accepts such little reverses philosophically and in good humor.

"It has the air of being tired, eh, Monsieur Brichot?" he remarked conversationally after the last collapse.

Brichot, a tall, big-boned Norman with cold blue eyes and a permanent expression of aloof contempt, looked at the thatch roof resting flat on the ground. "It has the air of being built by a fool, he said with a trace of weariness.

Atua's temper is reserved for his wife alone. "Well, now," he answered unruffled, "don't be inquieted. In a very little time I shall make it remount and it will be as good as new."

"And how good is that?" Brichot inquired acidly. "It will be like everything else on this imbecile island-slipshod, make shift, a disgrace."

A small band of us had gathered about the wreck - Teuru and Tavae, assorted children, two women with babes in arms and at Brichot's words we looked at each other in covert amusement. All of us knew that Monsieur heartily despised Tahiti and especially the natives and the few Americans who lived upon it. We knew also that at fifty-seven world-traveler Brichot was in reduced circumstances and that for nearly five years he had been living on twelve francs a day while he impatiently waited for a wealthy father in Paris to die and leave his money. ("Thank God," he once exclaimed to me in a moment of enlightening and unusual confidence, "thank God, French law does not permit a man to disinherit his son.") His attitude and situation were considered a merry joke through out the island and I have often wondered if Brichot père, stubbornly living year after year, did not perhaps share it too.

Be this as it may, Atua spoke with sweet reasonableness. "Do not be troubled, Monsieur," he said to his employer of the moment. "As often as the wind may blow the beach house down, Atua will be here to set it up again."

Surely no one will deny that it is a commendable attitude, and he has frequently demonstrated a similar readiness to rectify errors when he has been doing chores for me. Thus, a dripping faucet may receive his attention on five successive days of the week with the result that the drip is eventually arrested, or nearly so; the kerosene stove may be dismantled a half dozen times until it burns after a fashion, unless the wind swings into the southwest. In sum, Atua's persistence, his desire to please, would make him the ideal workman if it were not that his mind, instead of being on what he is doing, dwells day and night on a single thing: a large, brown whine whose name (appropriately, when considered in conjunction with his own) is Angèle. For years I watched Atua's inept fumblings as he mended the garden hose, the kitchen drain, or the trellis for bougainvillaea, never suspecting that the out thrust jaw, the furrowed brow and the muttered oaths had nothing to do with the task in hand. But even today when I realize that the quiet fury with which he appears to apply himself to the washer that won't fie or the nail chat won't drive is in truth directed solely at Angèle - even now I am still a long way from understanding it. There must be something about Angèle which does not readily meet the eye.

I have little difficulty in describing what does meet the eye when it is turned upon Angèle because I see her frequently, always under the same

awkward circumstances. Her visits take place after dark and the most recent of these occurred only last night.

Teuru was doing the supper dishes to the accompaniment of Tavae's soft strumming on the guitar and, because of a rumor that a ship was on its way north from New Zealand I was trying to write some letters. It is very difficult to write letters in a place where there is never any news and nothing ever happens, so that, although I kept the pen poised, it did not move. This did not trouble me greatly because it was quite possible that in all the surrounding Pacific no ship was making for Papeete, that we would not see one for another month or even two or three, and in any event a telegraphic note can always be dashed off when a vessel is actually visible in the roadstead. Mainly, then, I was enjoying the evening quiet. The cat was curled up in his customary corner on top of the bookcase idly swishing his great plume of a tail to clear away the ivory elephants, carved idols and other little ornaments. The cairn, christened Bunny and called Pani, lay close beside me on the couch where I could scratch his ears. The family of fat lizards, come down for supper from their lofty home in the pandanus near the roof-tree, were ranged in a rough circle about the electric light on the wall. With bright pin-point eyes they watched the dance of insects about the bulb, daintily snapping up the tiny winged things one by one. A wonderful peace filled the entire house even as it did the moonless night without. From somewhere on the stilled lagoon, only slightly raised above the low drum-tremble of the reef, came the voices of a pair of fishermen, and far down the beach someone whistled for a dog. So clear were these seaside sounds that they might have risen from the very doorstep, and at such a time of evening inland sounds have the power to carry almost as far and well.

Consequently, when Angèle's piteous cries of terror first shattered the night's tranquility, I knew that she must be still some distance off and that if I were quick about it there was time to escape from the house and go to sleep at a friend's. But despite her enormous bulk, Angèle covers the ground at high speed when Atua with his shorter and only slightly slower legs is in pursuit. Immediate action was necessary if I were to get in the clear, and I am rarely capable of anything of the sore. The guitar playing in the kitchen had stopped abruptly and I could hear Teuru excitedly telling her brother to get ready to lock the doors. Resignedly I screwed on the cap of the fountain pen, slipped it into my pocket, folded my hands and prepared to wait.

But Angèle was even more fleet than usual this night, the wait exceedingly brief. Her cries for help became loud and clear and a few moments later the floor shook as, panting and breathless, she heaved herself into the kitchen. The back door slammed shut and Tavae came skipping into the front room to take care of the double Dutch door which under all ordinary circumstances remains hospitably wide.

Atua and I spent a great deal of time figuring out this door: the upper halves are glass and the lower are bamboo set in a light wooden framework.

None of its various parts fits very exactly with any of the others but because there is nothing else like it on the island many a Tahitian has come to inspect and admire it. It is always with a feeling of regret that I see it shut in Atua's darkly perspiring Neanderthaloid face. Tavae closed only the bottom halves of this interesting door and fastened them with the hook intended to hold them together. Far from raising any serious physical obstacle, the gesture was pure symbolism and indicated that until Atua should have cooled off the white man's dwelling was forbidden him. Since the flimsy barrier is of his own devising, Atua knows better than anyone that a very little pressure will burst it wide, that a gentle wind is enough to make it fly apart, and that when there is anything resembling a storm the dining table must be moved against it for support. Just what causes him to respect so ephemeral a tapu I have never been able to discover. But, however badly he wants to crash through and take Angèle by the hair, he would never think to do so providing I myself am present, and it may be recognition of this curious fact that compels my attendance during the recurrent crises in the carpenter's domestic affairs.

At Angèle's hasty entry the dog beside me pricked up its ears and we both listened. Soon we heard the rapid thudding of Atua's calloused feet and in the next instant, puffing and blowing, he staggered up to grasp the window sill close beside me as an exhausted swimmer might clutch a life raft. He folded his arms on the ledge, laid his forehead upon them and sought for breath. He was some minutes in finding it. With small rump and tail wagging happily, Pani got up and stood on my stomach in order to lick Atua's elbows (he is as fond of Atua as I am myself, and even more tolerant of his tantrums) and in the meantime the others came out of the kitchen.

Angèle had quickly regained her composure the minute sanctuary was reached. Now the tears had been wiped away with a comer of her pareu and, though Teuru and Tavae walked with a sympathetic arm about her, she was in no need of assistance. She did not look at her husband's head where it hung over the window sill, and aside from the exaggerated rising and falling of her vast bosom there was hardly a trace of her recent dash for safety. She smiled.

"Bon soir, monsieur," she said politely, apologetically.

"Good evening, Angèle. I've not seen you for nearly three weeks, I think."

"Yes," she agreed. "There has been a long while of no trouble." She sat on one of the little cane chairs which Teuru drew out from the dining table and overflowed it on all sides. "But this time," she continued equably, "it was a close thing. If Atua had not fallen over Terii Gadiot's sow I should not be here."

"You would not be among the living," Teuru said indignantly and she frowned at Atua's still unmoving head. "You would have gone to join our beloved ancestors and tomorrow we should have been sitting about your dear little body singing songs and drinking black coffee."

Teuru was being very inaccurate in more ways than one. In the first place, if Atua had not stumbled over the pig Angèle would have been bruised -

pretty much all over - but not dead. Secondly, Angèle's body is, of course, not small; it is the biggest thing of the sort in our district, and it is also the cause of the tri-weekly foot races. Angèle's shoulders are less broad than usual among Tahitian women but immediately below them she widens out speedily to encompass breasts of an unlimited capacity and then spreads more and more till her hips are reached. These the ordinary pareu fails to cover and she is obliged to piece two of them together - a doubling up of expense of which I have often heard Atua muttering during working hours. The face which rides above all this material is round, fat-cheeked, full-lipped and benign, giving to the whole the appearance of a placid, good-natured female Buddha. It would be impossible for anyone not to be impressed by Angèle's padded bulk, but the tormenting conviction that she is universally coveted which plagues Atua day and night (especially at night) seems unreasonable.

"With your permission, Monsieur Beel, I will borrow the playing cards." Teuru lifted up the cat from the bookcase, removed the deck and went to seat herself beside Angèle. They began to play the inexplicably mirth-provoking game called companie. Tavae brought in the guitar so that he could strum while he watched. In this manner they would indefinitely continue to ignore the state of siege.

At last Atua lifted his head and looked at me. "Mon cher Beel," he said earnestly. "I wish to speak to you as one man another."

"Very well, Atua. But I warn you I am going to bed very soon. Is there something new tonight?"

"New? It is *always* a new thing."

"Pay no attention to us," said Teuru considerately. "When you are sleepy go to bed."

"You are a gentleman," Atua continue generously. "Now I wish to ask. Would you knowingly harbor a bad woman your house?"

"B'en ... "

"Would you give shelter to one who shows no respect for marriage?"

Although Atua had never got around to an actual ceremony, civil or otherwise, I knew that he intended to do so someday, and in any case twelve years of living together certainly constituted a solid marriage and justified his use of the term.

"Would you," he persisted, "take into your house a vahine who will give a man a cold fish for his supper and then, while he eats it, amuse herself with another? Would you do that, Monsieur Beel?"

"Well, who was it this time?"

"The mutoi," he said bitterly, "the gendarme. That worthless Tahitian to whom the government pays three hundred francs each month for sitting about in a uniform and cap. Ah, if you could have seen her fondling his buttons! Even if the fish had been good I should have retched at such a sight. It was then I sought to take her by the ear." He paused and glanced at his wife who was giggling happily over the cards with Teuru. "I should still like to do that

thing if Monsieur will be so good as to bid me enter. . . . "

"No, Atua, I do not wish a bagarre. You ought to do your fighting in your own house."

"Nothing would please me more," he replied with feeling. "But the worthless creature is swift. If I prevent her leaving by the door she is out the window. Like a gull or a tern or a flying fish she goes through the window."

I could not picture Angèle going like any of the things Atua mentioned but whether she did or not it was clear to me that he was being even more absurd than usual.

"Really, Atua," I said to him, "why do you insist on making such a big fool of yourself? What difference does it make what Angèle does with the gendarme's buttons? What harm can result? He is old enough to be your grandfather; he is so old he can hardly stand."

"Much can be accomplished without standing," he remarked sullenly.

"Not by a gray-haired vieillard like the mutoi."

In some way it appeared I had offended Angèle. She laid down her cards. When she looked at me the smile had left her plump face and in its stead was an expression of faintly smug satisfaction. "You do our gendarme an injustice," she said calmly.

"Indeed yes," Teuru agreed. "Of what use is it for me to tell you of all the village happenings when you remain so ignorant? Little more than a year and a half has gone by since he last became a father."

"And now again," Tavae added, "his wife's opu is handsomely large. The mutoi is still a man of ability."

Atua slapped his broad slanting forehead. "A-u-e! You see? You see how it is? Now papa Beel - good friend, dear good friend - will you not put out your hand and open the door? I swear to you the bagarre will be brief and when it is over you will be rid of all these troublesome people and myself also. You will sleep soundly."

I put the dog on the floor and got up. "I intend to sleep soundly regardless."

"Have no fear," Tavae assured me. "I shall not allow the guitar to speak loudly and if we sing that, too, will be softly done."

We all said good night and I went into the bedroom and closed the door behind me. In so doing I removed myself only slightly from the others. The partitions which define the various rooms of the house are paper thin and have no ceilings other than the common roof of parchment colored pandanus leaves. Even as I undressed, therefore, I could hear Atua begin his pacing back and forth outside and knew that the periodic pauses in the footfalls indicated halts to glare balefully at the light-hearted and comfortably secure card players. Hours would pass before he finally seated himself at the base of a coco palm facing the house, with his back against the trunk. Very little later his head would fall forward on his thick chest - the signal for the others to turn out the light, curl up on the floor, and allow sweet peace again to fill my house

on the Pirae strand.

Because of the sharp early morning chill and his unprotected sleeping place, Atua would awaken long before the rest of us. Groaning at the stiffness in his joints, he would struggle to his feet and, with the famed temper reduced once more to the simmering point or lower, go shivering off to his home to wait, nearly docile, for Angèle to appear and make breakfast.

As I reviewed, over the tisane, Atua's very human foibles I began to regret having allowed Mrs. Winship to depart in such a mistaken frame of mind. It would have been more kind, perhaps, to have explained to her about God. I could at least have told her how it was with the lavabo.... but would her doubts about our sanity have thereby been resolved? Upon further consideration it did not seem likely.

There are, in this vicinity, no fixed rules as to the order in which the various parts of a house shall be constructed. Some people make a roof and then, working in the comfortable shade, add a house under it. Atua generally prefers for reasons of his own to go at the floor first, then raise a framework around and above it, leaving the cover of thatch for last of all. That is the way he did with the dwelling in which I write.

During all the weeks of construction I was the guest of a generous friend who has his home a little more than a quarter mile distant along the bay, and it was my habit to swim down each morning to my property, there to sit for an hour or two watching Atua hammer and saw and fume. Swimming a slow crawl, I was usually able to hear, first through one ear then the other, the sounds of his exertions long before I arrived. But a morning finally came when all was silent as I made my way up from the lagoon. I found Atua lying on the floor in the full glare of the sun which shone unimpeded through the naked framework of rafters overhead. He had covered his face with a banana frond and he was asleep. I removed the leaf.

He blinked his eyes a few times, then sat up and smiled at me engagingly. "What heat, eh, Monsieur Beel? Sleep is made difficult."

"Perhaps if you were to get the roof on ... "

"Yes," he agreed, "then it will be better. Then the siesta will be long and good." I opened my mouth but Atua anticipated me. "The roof will soon follow. Only be tranquil a little longer and it will come."

I cast an eye about and it seemed that the greater part of the house proper was already intact. The partitions were up, the built-in bookcases were installed, the curving front steps of green cement and the adjacent small foot bath, also of green cement, all appeared complete. Providing no rain fell before he got to the roof, it looked as if the house were a success. "Is there any reason why we cannot go ahead with the thatch?" I inquired.

"One only: the lavabo."

"What about the washbasin?"

"It remains to be placed," he explained. 'With your permission I will do it now."

I gave my permission and Atua went out to the hut in which furniture, tools and the basin were stored and returned staggering under the load of a heavy crate. He eased it gently to the ground by the front door. With his hammer he carefully pried off the stout boards, then removed the excelsior and the paper wrapping. "Ah, ah, ah," he exclaimed appreciatively when the white porcelain gleamed in the sun, "what beauty!" He passed a hand gently over the shining surface. "Not in the Governor's palace is there grandeur like this."

Neither of us, of course, had ever examined the Governor's washbasins but to me also it seemed improbable that Tahiti held another lavabo quite so splendid as that which Atua then slowly and tenderly lifted in his arms. It had been ordered especially for the house we were building and, although it had come to us by way of Sydney, small letters above the drain stated that it had been made in distant England. Atua rested it on his knee while he got a better grip and then with elaborate caution came forward.

I was obliged to smile at his exaggerated solicitude. "Come along," I said, "it is not glass."

"Nevertheless I prefer to take care," Atua answered sagely and then, stepping into the empty foot bath, he tripped and fell on the cement steps. The lavabo shattered.

Still prone amid the debris he turned his head and looked up at me. "Oh, monsieur," he said sadly, reproachfully, "only see what you have done."

"Eh?"

"You were wrong to have spoken. Not glass, no. But it breaks in as many pieces."

The pieces were indeed numerous and I must have been staring at them in some dejection because Atua arose and remarked comfortingly, "It serves nothing to blame yourself, but another time the mouth is better closed."

Later in the day I ordered another basin, less grand than the first, to be sent out from Papeete and on the following morning I was again present to oversee the installation. In accord ance with Atua's advice, I maintained a strict silence till the lavabo had safely reached the bath and been fastened to the wall. When this much was accomplished I felt free to go and sit on the front steps and look at the water, leaving Atua to figure out for himself how to attach the pipe. A glance had shown me that the drain protruded from the floor at an angle such that it would require some ingenuity to make it join with the plumbing fixture for which it was intended, but the thought of fresh disaster had never occurred to me until a single sharp report such as a twenty-two rifle might make came to my ears. There was an ominous silence before Atua exclaimed loudly, "Sapristi!" and then threw down his tools with a clatter. I went back to the bath. He had succeeded in forcing the pipes together and, very naturally, lavabo number two had burst, not in many parts, but in neat halves each of which was still bracketed firmly to the wall.

"Have I done something?" I asked.

Atua frowned and scratched his bullet head. "No," he admitted. "It is evident the thing is possessed by a tupapau." But though an evil ghost might be to blame Atua this time made good. He bought the last remaining new basin in town with his own money and it would probably still be doing service today if, when he was lying on the roof, his hammer had not fallen and lit upon it.

By that time I had begun myself to wonder if tupapaus must not be in some way concerned but Atua came through again, giving me the lavabo from his own house together with a note written in indifferently spelled French seating: "I the undersigned Atua Mamatuaitehutapu acknowledge to have broken a lavabo belong my friend in doing his work and charge myself purely and simply to place my own, and when there is a new to pay for and place it definitively. Pirae, the 28 August."

I still have this crumpled sheet of paper and I still have also the antique basin of French manufacture which Atua tells me he acquired when a waterfront rooming house was torn down some years ago. We have never exchanged it for a new and, barring further mishap, probably never will, because I have grown fond of it. Despite its age - or perhaps for that very reason - it carries an air of distinction. Clearly, it is an article with a history, a history stretching all the way from Paris to Papeete, and I am often brought to wonder what owner it may have been who, with a sharp implement, scratched upon its yellowed surface the words, "Ça va, Sophie." I wonder about Sophie, too.

It had grown cooler while I sat musing about God's peculiarities and Teuru came in to gather up the tea tray.

"You might turn on the shower," I said, "so that it will run cold."

She went to do so and in a moment returned. "The robinet," she said holding out the faucet. "It has come off."

"*Again*?"

"Is it Atua's fault," she defended quickly, "that foreign things forever come apart?"

"Well, give it to me and I will put it on myself."

"No, no," she said firmly. "That would give offense to Atua. I will go immediately and ask that he come running."

Teuru left and I prepared myself to wait, well aware that Atua has never in all his life been known to run for my house except in pursuit of his beloved Angèle.

## VIII. *Invitation to the Brawl*

THE OLD *Wairuna* had again made her uncertain way back to our island. I first saw the smudge she sends into the sky in the early afternoon, and by four she was steaming slowly past the reefs of Pirae, so near that with the binoculars it was possible to distinguish figures on her rusty decks. If I had known that one of the people standing at her rail was Miri, the same Miri whom I'd last seen on a San Francisco wharf with her hair whipped by a cold wind, the same who had then seemed destined to become a top-flight movie star, I should have hurried off to Papeete to be one of the first to kiss her on both cheeks the moment she set foot ashore. Everyone loves Miri and I am no exception. Generally I start for town the moment a ship is sighted, quite regardless of who may be expected, and in this too I am like everyone else. But for once I decided to remain quietly at home even though to do so meant going without supper or rustling for myself. Tavae and Teuru could never be expected to forego the drama of boat-day and had long since disappeared.

I opened a can of baked beans, another of brown bread, brewed a pot of coffee and had just transferred everything to the table when I heard the twang of an approaching guitar and a voice, even louder, roaring the song about the contrast in the accessibility of American and Tahitian women. That it was Timi's favorite song - possibly because he has himself tested the truth of the story it tells - I had well learned during the seventeen days and nights during which we shared one of *Wairuna's* minute cabins on the last southward voyage. And that it was Timi himself who now destroyed the evening calm there could be no doubt, for no one sings with quite the same gusto as he.

When the old topless touring car (favorite of several frightfully dilapidated island taxis) drove up, I saw that Timi, like a true traveling minstrel, stood erect in the tonneau and that on the seat behind him, rocking from side to side with arms interlaced, were Teuru and Tavae with none other than delightful, ravishing, amoral, irresponsible Miri between them. Fati, the chauffeur, threw a good part of his ninety kilos on to the brakes and then slid out from behind

the wheel to pry open the balky rear door, but before he had succeeded the others leaped over the side and were in the house.

Miri, smelling pleasantly of absinthe and tiki perfume, threw herself into my arms. "I am back, papa Beel, I am back and I never go away again! You are glad I am back?"

I held her at arm's length and looked into the flushed, happy face, at the too wide mouth parted in the smile which had dazzled so many theatergoers in the States, at the flashing dark eyes which had set all Hollywood agog. "Gosh, Miri, of course I'm glad; everyone'll be glad!"

The others stood around beaming and Teuru said in her best sailor's French, "We have come to invite you to make the brawl with us."

"Gottam yes," said Timi in his best English. "We gotta keep going all night; we gotta go clear round the island and we gotta have you to do it."

I looked at the table which I had so recently and carefully laid. The knife and fork were on the proper sides of the plate as I used once to try to persuade Teuru to place them, and the beans steamed appetizingly. But Miri's glance followed mine.

"Popaa food!" she said scornfully. "I hope I never see any again as long as I live. You don't want to eat, cheri." She drew me toward the door.

If I seemed to hesitate it was not because of unwillingness to share in the fete which Miri's return clearly demanded. It was merely that I was trying to remember if I had at the minute sufficient funds in the Banque de l'Indo-Chine to permit me to accept the invitation.

Apparently Fati read my thoughts. "For you, mon cher Beel, I will do a special thing. All night the voiture will roll for twelve francs the kilometer."

There was good sense in the offer. Fati was, in effect, throwing away fifty centimes for each kilometer that we might cover, and we would cover a great many. But he realized, as did I, that his capacity for beer (at three francs the bottle) was such that he would easily come out ahead.

Tavae had remained silent up to this time but now he demonstrated that he also understood. "The taxi, Fati, is not a big affair. It is the number of drinks that our friend will buy that is of importance." It was slightly embarrassing to all of us to have the truth so bluntly stated and Teuru pinched her brother's elbow while Timi, who stood just behind, lifted his knee suddenly so that Tavae was briefly raised off the floor. But Timi has the ability to smooth the most painful situation.

"We wish you with us because we love you," he explained earnestly, then added with engaging frankness, "And it so happens that this evening finds us each without a sou."

"Chiefly," said Miri sweetly as she twined her hand in mine, "it is that one loves you."

Nothing was to be gained by trying to resist the inevitable and in a very short time we were all in the touring car, which Fati piloted, much more swiftly than necessary, down the narrow winding road leading to the island-

circling highway. We were thrown violently from side to side as he avoided here a fallen coconut, there a chicken, pig or dog, but Timi, again erect in the swaying tonneau, miraculously kept his feet and, with the guitar gripped firmly, lifted his voice so that the people in each thatch house past which we whizzed might share in our enjoyment. His choice of a song - a number called "Lucy Toata" - was probably purely haphazard, for it was mainly concerned with an intimate description of the mythical Lucy's anatomy and had no particular bearing on the expedition on which we were setting forth. But it was lively, and many a smiling roadside watcher picked it up to shout back at us the lilting chorus. With no slackening of speed we sailed around the right-angle turn onto the highway where stands Ah You's tin-roofed grocery. We grazed the veranda and the youths who were seated along it eating watermelons prudently pulled in their legs.

"Arearea maitai!" they called. "Have fun!"

"Mauruuru," we replied, "Thanks, thanks!" and sped on our zigzag path down the darkening highway with Fati bent over the wheel in the manner of a French cyclist racing through a newsreel. The wind shrieked in our ears and blew the girls' hair in our faces. Arearea? I there is anything more fun than risking one's neck in a broken-down touring car racing through the night along Tahiti's borders, no native of that island has ever discovered it.

Timi had given up his song; the wind blew the words back down his throat (which is where some unkind soul will doubt less say they belonged) and now he leaned over Fati's shoulder. "It is a fast thing," he shouted approvingly. "Make it more so!"

"It is a thing fast enough," I protested but no one paid attention. We lunged into the one-way bridge at the end of the orange groves and - because nothing else chanced to be passing - emerged on the other side where the road slopes down ward to Papeete. Although a little of the day's light may still have lingered on the shores, we here entered a region of utter darkness where trees grew close at either hand, throwing out a solid leafy canopy above. Quickly Fati snapped on the lights and they blazed forth brilliantly but not, as one would expect, upon the road. No, due to an error in assembly or to the strange urge for originality so conspicuous in native mechanics, our headlights stabbed directly for the heavens, leaving the highway only slightly less obscure than before.

"Hope te au!" all my companions exclaimed at once. I think "Oh, boy!" is about the only translation for this expression, and it is very probable that I murmured something of the sort myself, because the effect of our misdirected lamps was astonishingly beautiful. Overhead the majestic tunnel through which we rocketed was turned to emerald green. It was a lovely glowing green blended of the illumined fronds of cocotiers, of the foliage of flamboyants, mapes and tamanus but, due to the swiftness of our passage, no individual leaf or frond could be distinguished, and all merged in a band of color that appeared like smoothly flowing water on which the sun is shining

bright. Before and behind, the intensity of color diminished, dwindling to deeper and deeper shades till, far away, it was lost in the black of night. Fati drove with eyes on the converging branches, and so kept us where he judged the road to be. I glanced at the three on the seat beside me. Tavae's handsome profile showed his habitually calm, thought free expression. Teuru smiled with eyes half closed. But Miri had eyes to see and they were wide, filled with the air of happy, ingenuous wonder that is her greatest charm. Then they turned to me. Her moist lips parted slowly, and anyone could have seen that she was deeply stirred.

"You know, Beel," she said, "it makes me think of crème de menthe."

Presumably Miri continued to think of her favorite liqueur during the next few minutes, but then we gained the outskirts of town where the road forks to pass on either side of the ancient and famous Tiare hotel and there another idea suddenly entered her mind.

"Stop, Fati!" she shrieked, "I must have maa tinto."

Maa tinto is Chinese food and for a number of years the Tiare has been the best place to get it. Miri's suggestion was good because nothing provides a better foundation for a strenuous evening than a lot of rice sprinkled with odds and ends. Fati, always glad to dine at any hour, drew up close beside the garden gate. Timi leaped over the side, raced in to make arrangements and, finding the situation of tables on the spacious veranda not to his liking, soon had the anxious Chinaman shifting things all over while he shouted imperious orders. Tahitians tend in general to be somewhat contemptuous of the humble and clever orientals who live upon their island, but Timi is even more lordly and overbearing than most. Admittedly, though, his manner obtains respect and results, and even before I had got myself out of the car, slippered feet were flap-flapping as they ran to bring wine and beer and apéritifs.

When the rest of us entered Timi was already seated with his feet upon a second chair. There is a sort of tacit convention that people who wish to make noise shall take places on one side of the hotel, while those who intend to behave more circumspectly shall use the other. Timi had chosen to ignore this custom and, with the guitar in his lap and his shirt unbuttoned to the belt, was established in the center of the respectable quarter. Unconscious of the pained expressions of a scattering of French fonctionnaires, he launched, at our approach, into "My Mary":

*Everybody wants my Mary;*
*How I love my sweetheart-*
*Gottam, whatsa matta you?*

Fati disappeared into the interior, then came back carrying a concertina; Tavae balanced an inverted chair on his knees in order to produce rhythm with the fat of his large hands. Instead of seating themselves it was only natural that Miri and Teuru should promptly embrace and begin to dance gaily round and round among the diners. A second natural consequence of the

alluring music was that a number of Tahitians came from the off-side of the building to peer hopefully around the corner. Timi broke into his song long enough to shout a jovial invitation. "Come and eat!" They accepted with alacrity and a Chinaman hustled to push a second table against our own.

"Feti," Timi explained to me, "relatives."

They may well have been, for everyone upon Tahiti is in some degree feti to everyone else. But had they been voyagers from Rimatara or Pitcairn it would have made no difference. Our party was bound to grow and this first addition, as I recall, consisted of two young couples and a smiling grand mother of few teeth. We had started on the tihopu nui, or noodle soup, when several young men of Pirae ( those, no doubt, who had watched us miss so narrowly the corner grocery) arrived out of breath from bicycling in pursuit. Timi made no claim to relationship to these and it was Teuru's and Tavae's turn to do the honors.

"But, but, but!" said Teuru in pleased surprise. "Here are boys from our district. Come and eat with us!"

Table number three was added and without hesitation the youths drew up chairs. Thus, by means of repeated accretions, we came at last to monopolize the greater part of the Tiare's more sedate side, the festive board paralleling the entire length of the decayed balustrade which separated us from the garden and the Tahitian night. The ia neoneo (stinky fish - the stink being obtained by a certain process of sun-drying) had just been placed before us when old Captain Demming appeared with his entourage and, my own instincts for hospitality now rising, I called out to him, "Oh, captain, won't you join us?" He stared at us myopically for a few moments then decided to accept. Since there was by that time no longer room to make further extensions in a straight line, a table was placed domino fashion at right angles to the head of the board where I presided, and the old gentleman approached, followed in single file by his two young vahines ( the pretty one and the imbecile one) and by a small boy carrying a portable phonograph. He seated the two girls with great solicitude, then carefully drew from the left pocket of his mussed white coat a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label and set it on the table. From the right-hand pocket he produced a second bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label and deposited it beside the first. Lastly he sat down facing them and smiled through his untidy beard. Meanwhile the boy, whom the captain has well trained, found a packing case and placed it close to his master's elbow. On top of it he opened the phonograph, and stood waiting for the word.

Captain Demming spoke the word. "Turn," he said.

The boy wound the crank briskly, lowered the needle, and the machine raised a thin but penetrating voice in competition with the general hubbub. The tune was one which I think the captain must have been carrying about the world since the days of sail; it was called "Auntie Skinner's Chicken Dinner" and on the reverse side was "The Little Old Ford Rambled Right Along." Perhaps it may seem curious that I should remember such details or that,

remembering, I should trouble to mention them. So I must explain that whenever the old man set forth for an evening - and there were few till the very day of his death that he stayed home - he went always equipped with a single disk and that, except when he was carrying his bottles from one restaurant or cabaret to another, it was never stilled. Having invited him to join us I had set the tone for the entire night and so it is impossible, even at this late date, to get Auntie and the Ford quite out of mind.

No one paid the captain much attention, because his battered merchant officer's cap and blue denim shorts, his thin bare shanks and frayed tennis shoes were long familiar, just as were his slight idiosyncrasies. Although others could hardly avoid sharing its raucous, tinny whine, the phonograph was understood to be for his entertainment alone, the whiskey for his lips only. When he first acquired the two vahines, the coconut radio had been jammed with interested gossip. People told each other with pleased amazement of the large sums of money with which the girls were continually supplied, and described in detail the beautiful dresses that they wore. Speculation was rife as to what duties they might perform in return for such largesse but, despite the fact that information of the sort is usually easily come by upon this island, little of a definite nature was learned. Doubtless it was the novelty of seeing matters generally considered common property surrounded with reticence and mystery that finally aroused my own curiosity to such a pitch that I once tried to make tactful inquiry of Rite, the pretty one. I received a vapid smile and a non-committal answer: "Il est très gentil, mon petit vieux" which was certainly all the reply I deserved. Even so, it was very un-Tahitian behavior.

But other topics had long since displaced that of les filles Demming, and it may well be that among the entire chop stick busied crowd then assembled in honor of Miri's return to her native land I was the only one who still retained a lively interest in the captain. It never occurred to me to criticize the hoary seafarer for consuming his liquor with no concern for others. In a country where sponging beachcombers are not only legendary but fact, his habit of always bringing his own appealed to me as thoughtful and proper rather than other wise. Even as, with never diminished regard for his ability, I watched him fill a tumbler, firmly replace the cork, then drain the glass completely and calmly smooth his beard with a folded napkin, my thoughts were not really concentrated on the often witnessed performance. Instead I was wondering whatever could have induced him to take Punau under his protection. My eyes wandered to the second of the girls and convinced me once again that in all the South Seas there could hardly be another living soul so homely. She was thin and flat chested, lanky-haired, dull-eyed, loose-lipped - a picture of brown idiocy. More than simply seeming so, Punau was in all truth harmlessly, but thoroughly, dotty. She must have been in her twenties, but she had not yet learned to string words together to form sentences - a deficiency that did not, however, result in silence. She was, on the contrary, one of most

energetically and disconcertingly articulate people I have ever known, and the fact that her individual pronouncements were confined to single words having no remotest bearing what was being said did not make them any the less impressive. The monosyllables which came at intervals from her lips were delivered with emphasis, abruptly, explosively; then she looked vaguely, shyly, from face to face for approval - an approval that must, I fear, have been lacking when she chanced to be among the uninitiated because, although her vocabulary consisted of English, French and Tahitian words, all were shocking. What struck me as most remarkable was the clock like regularity of her arresting utterances. It was almost as if she were in some way geared to the implacably grinding phonograph which the little boy wound for five francs a day; the wheels turned a fixed number of times, a lever was released, her foolish lips parted and the brief, dismaying ejaculation popped out to hang meaningless in the air.

Suddenly I had an idea. It was an idea that explained Punau perfectly. Over a period of almost half a century Demming had regularly brought ships into Papeete harbor several times a year - first schooners, then steamships and lastly, shortly before his final retirement, deisel-powered motor vessels. Punau was his daughter! I must have been staring at the unfortunate girl, and the captain must have observed it. He put an end to my musings.

"Who would keep her," he said to me, "if I did not?"

There was, then, no drama - just an old seaman's good heart, and I was obliged to reproach myself for never having considered so simple and natural a solution.

I lifted my glass. "Here's to you, captain."

He merely nodded and filled his own, a bumper this time, and tipped it up.

"Don't you go it a little strong?" I inquired, eyeing him nevertheless with respect.

He passed a hand over his beard and looked at me tolerantly, somewhat blearily. "Unlike yourself, sir, I cannot afford to be leisurely. My time upon this island is severely limited."

"You are leaving Tahiti?"

"No," he said patiently, "I shall never leave, but I shall die." It was a casual statement with nothing of the lugubrious and, for some reason, the turn of the conversation did not even strike me as out of keeping with the carousal at which we were assisting.

Miri called from halfway down the table. "Amuse yourself well!"

"It is a good thing our party, no?" Timi shouted.

"See how Monsieur Beel uses the chopsticks like shovels!" Teuru laughed.

Punau's mouth fell open. "----!" she stated, and the captain reached over to pat her hand gently, then gave his attention once more to me.

"I allow myself two years," he continued, "two years to round out a total of seventy-five."

"Let us hope there will be many more."

"No, no," he replied quickly. "Do not misunderstand me. I neither expect nor desire more. My plans call for two; all my calculations are based upon it."

I stared at him blankly and, leaning closer, surrounding us both with an aroma of Johnny Walker, he undertook to enlighten me further. "It is all a question of money." he explained solemnly. "Have you not noticed how difficult it is to get rid of on this island?"

My eyes wandered over the long rows of feasters, most of whom, now replete, had pushed their plates away. "No-o," I told him truthfully, "it has never seemed to me to present any particular problem."

"Indeed!" Demming appeared surprised. "Permit me to ask you a question. Have you ever lived in Boston or New York or San Francisco?"

"In all three."

"Good. And I presume that you used on occasion to seek with some companion an evening's entertainment. Now, tell me, did the money not melt away?"

"I am sure it did."

"Precisely. Then let us return to Tahiti." He waved an arm to include all of us who then filled the broad veranda. "All this is your affair, is it not?"

"I'm afraid it is."

The captain had become very intent upon his catechism. Small beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead and he removed the broken-visored cap to pass a napkin over his bald head. Then he came back to the attack. "How many guests would you say are present?" he demanded.

"I have not the faintest idea."

"Exactly," he exclaimed in triumph. "They are practically beyond number. And when Si Qui presents the addition for all they have eaten and drunk and broken, what will it amount to?"

"To a very tidy sum," I replied with some heat.

Captain Demming smiled in his beard. "Will it be greater than would be required to entertain a single friend in the city of New York? No. And here you have given pleasure, not to one, but to scores."

I should have been obliged to admit that he was, in the main, correct but we were temporarily interrupted by loud demands upon Timi, Fati and Tavae for music. The cries arose from all about the table. "Himene!" they yelled, "Sing, sing!"

Timi is always willing. He made a grab for the guitar and lit into the gay nineties favorite which was just then - half a century later - enjoying a tremendous vogue in Tahiti. Every one joined in and the night resounded. "Tara rara *pum* tu e, tara rara *pum* ti e!" There was danger of the phonograph being drowned out and the captain gave directions over his shoulder to the custodian of the machine. A shorter, louder needle was hurriedly inserted. "Turn," his master instructed, and the boy wound the crank furiously so that Auntie Skinner's voice was lifted with fresh energy to a still higher pitch.

Punau was stimulated into speech. "----!" she declaimed.

The captain nodded to her indulgently. "Quite so, quite so." He plied again the bottle, pouring as if it were tea. "Yes," he resumed, shaking his head and speaking close to my ear, "in this open-handed land it requires careful planning, constant effort and determination to go quickly through a fortune. You see before you, sir, a man who is harried and hard pressed. My problem is sizable, a fact for which I have only myself to blame. Why should I have lived so frugally during all my years at sea? Why did I not realize that I was amassing a burden that would require all my strength and ingenuity to shake off during my last days?" He looked at me fixedly through his rheumy eyes. "I greatly fear, my dear sir, that stupidity is the answer, and now I find myself obliged to accomplish in two years' time what I had done better to spread over a life's span." He indicated the two girls and the little player of the music box. "They will be taken care of when I am gone. But too much money is worse for these good people than none. Accordingly I have provided for them in moderation so that they may live comfortably without, perhaps, going to perdition. Still, in so doing, I am left in little better case. My wealth remains sizable, the time appallingly short. When you have reached my age," he concluded, "two years seem no more than a passing moment, and yet it is a moment for which I have planned most exactly, dividing it into days, even hours and allotting to each a definite number of francs for disposal.

At this juncture a Chinese placed the bill before me and I picked it up to discover that, as I'd expected, it was considerable, whether viewed from Papeete or New York standards.

Captain Demming removed it gently from my hand. "Allow me," he said.

"Oh, no," I protested mildly, "really ... "

"I must insist," he explained apologetically. "I'm behind in my schedule," and with an air of relief and satisfaction he threw several five-hundred-franc notes on to the tablecloth.

I said no more, but I was faintly troubled. Although Polynesians have proved they can gauge exactly their time upon the earth, I questioned a white man's ability to do so. What on the last day of the second year he succeeded in his ambition of discarding his final sou - and then proceeded to live and on? It was a disturbing thought, but when Demming excused himself and rose to dance it slipped from my mind, which was probably just as well, because the problem never presented itself. As it developed, he did err in his estimates, but considerably on the long side, and before the next rainy season was done he was taken from our small community with his self-imposed task still uncompleted.

On the ambitious evening in the account of which I have got myself involved he was, however, amazingly spry. Those diners not connected with Miri's party had gradually dispersed the tables they had occupied were pushed aside, and a great part of our company now shuffled with bare feet over the rough boards, causing the entire hotel Tiare to vibrate and the musicians to double their efforts. Freed from the captain's macabre recital, I noted that

practically everyone danced. Rite had been snapped up by one of the bicycle contingent from Pirae; Miri and Teuru were also embraced by stalwart tanes. A single girl remained seated at table and that one, of course, was Punau. For who would ever think to dance with Punau? Who but that venerable man so intently engaged in his race against time her own protector, Captain Demming.

He stepped behind my chair and stood before her. "Mademoiselle?" he said, bowing low.

Punau rose, expressed her pleasure with a single devastating word, and the captain nimbly whisked her onto the floor. Even in a country where eccentricity is rule rather than exception the captain's method of dancing was something to be hold. With his partner held at a respectful distance, with knees bent and his weight supported on the heels of his tennis shoes, cap riding the back of his head, right arm rigidly extended, he whirled in an unbroken series of dizzying turns. That Punau enjoyed the merry-go-round was apparent from the blissful expression on her foolish face and others, even as they scattered to make way for the determinedly pirouetting seaman, cast him glances filled with esteem.

"A pue, mon capitan," Timi shouted delightedly. "Go to it!" and he beat a fevered tattoo on the body of the guitar.

While the captain went to it I was left with the choice of idly beating time on the tablecloth or of talking to myself. Because of the distance at which Timi and his cohorts sat and the proximity of the phonograph it was difficult to determine to which music to keep time, so I took to the latter course and started a mental conversation.

"Just look at yourself," I began provocatively. "Are you not ashamed so to fritter away your evenings?"

"Fritter? Meaning what?"

"Well, where will it get you?"

"Nowhere, I hope. I am very content right here."

"And where is that, pray?"

"In the Tiare, my good man; in the Tiare Hotel of Papeete, Tahiti, French Oceania."

"In a dive."

"Not at all. It is a charming place."

"Open your eyes and look about you."

I accepted this suggestion and seeing, among other things. that the captain had spun himself far away I poured a little of his liquor and sampled it.

"Well?" the troublesome first voice insisted.

"Well what?"

"Have you examined your surroundings?"

Often. A hundred times on as many different evenings."

"I think you hesitate to describe them."

"Ridiculous!" My indignation was rising. "I am perfectly willing." And

after again briefly fortifying myself at the captain's expense I proceeded to build the Tiare in words.

It wanders, it rambles, it sprawls in the way a structure intended from the first for hospitality should rightly do. It spreads itself under the old shading trees, hugging closely the warm earth, sending out wings and annexes and after-thoughts to north and south, east and west without design or order. There could never have been a plan. It simply grew. And in the same way that papayas or bananas sprout by fits and starts according to the rains, so the Tiare must have risen with similar fitfulness and naturalness, all depending upon the whims of the complacent workmen. In the beginning it is reasonable to suppose roofs and gables were painted bright green, walls and encircling balustrades were clothed in shining white, tables rested solidly on legs of equal length, chairs had cane seats quite intact, floors were level, the garden was swept of fallen leaves. But even in the fleeting period when all was new the Tiare could never have worn an air either prim or virtuous. From the start the true character of the amiable bawd of seaport tavern could not have failed to show through the paint and polish. Like the dusky, blowsy females who stand at the waterfront to welcome each incoming ship, she was destined to give herself as prodigally to tramp or nobleman, native or tourist, to receive treatment often rough and always careless, to take quick leave of youth and hurry into desuetude and neglect. So the paint has flecked away, the roofs are rusted brown, balustrades, rotted at the bottom, dangle from the sway-backed veranda railings, floors sag, ceilings bulge. Vines insinuate themselves through cracks in the walls, mold spreads over the steps, spiders drape their webs in every corner, ants bore, rats gnaw and the Tiare totters toward a final mingling with the damp soil that has supported it for so many, many years.

A day comes when a Tahitian fille de joie finds it useless to try to patch up or paint over the things that time has done. But there is then no cause for sadness. She merely changes her trade to that of flower-selling; she covers herself with countless wreaths of fragrant blooms and smilingly holds them out to all who pass. And so, emulating once again her sisters, the Tiare - jolliest of harlots - masks her ravaged features with a screen of flowering shrubs and trees, with sweet ferns grow ing riotously from gas tins lining all the rails, with huge bouquets hiding the dust of ages, with scented petals scattered on the tables. But however decrepit she may be within this pleasing camouflage, the hotel whose name means flower has never lost her lively ways. If the end comes at last in a sudden cataclysm, as seems more than likely, she'll collapse with decks still loaded with revelers, and in that case I should hardly be surprised to find myself among those who will dig their way out of the wreckage to go sadly in search of another inn with no slightest hope of finding one the like of the Tiare.

Timi had stopped for breath, the dancers were straggling back to table and Miri, passing, stooped to put a cheek to mine and softly plant a kiss in the vicinity of my ear. "It is a good party, n'est-ce pas?"

"Oh, yes - fine."

But suddenly a shadow came to mar briefly the happiness of our company. The captain, Rice and Punau had just resumed their places and the operator of the phonograph was briskly winding when a snapping, tearing sound issued from the machine. It was an ominous sound and so loud that it was heard from one end of the table to the other. Everyone turned to look with sympathy at the child who continued to twist the now useless crank, but more and more slowly while the expression of troubled concern grew upon his small, round face. At last he stopped and burst into sobs.

"Aue," he cried, "aue! It will never speak again!"

Other "aue's," equally heartfelt, arose on all sides, and the captain drew the tot between his knees. With a napkin he began to wipe away the tears.

"Aita peapea," he soothed gently, "never mind. We shall find its voice another day."

After a while the child quieted, but our high spirits did not return.

Miri got to her feet. "Our laughter has gone," she said. "Let us seek it at Quinn's."

Timi pushed back his chair. "Burn the reef, she is right! Come, friends, much remains to be done."

We all trooped out of the Tiare, the little boy carrying the injured music box in one hand, the other enclosed by the captain's.

## IX. *Chez Quinn*

EARLIER in this book I have touched on the subject of Quinn's cabaret in connection with Teuru's early morning habits. What I failed to mention at the time was that the place exerts an attraction almost as strong upon myself. Stray Americans sometimes refer to it as my "office" - meaning to suggest that I spend there most of my waking hours. They exaggerate. At the outside I am to be found within its doors no more than two nights a week; and such has been the case over a period of years.

By so shifting the scene of our activities we did not precisely move into a loftier stratum of island society. No, I suppose it might be said that, on the contrary, in the transfer we slid cheerfully down to a still lower and still less inhibited level of entertainment than even the Tiare affords. For, unlike the ancient hotel where the spirit of famed Lovaina continues occasionally to be heard to laugh, no attempt is made at Quinn's to reserve a certain area for the sedate customers. There are no such customers. There is no division, imaginary or otherwise, into "more respectable" and "less respectable" sides. With an admirable singleness of purpose, every inch of space is devoted to the hilariously, unrestrainedly disreputable, and this is especially true on nights when a ship happens to be lying in the tropic dark beside the quay.

It had seemed hardly worth while to enter Fati's car to cover the few blocks we had to go, and so he was allowed to drive ahead while we followed afoot through the unlighted streets. We walked, weaving only moderately, with arms locked, Miri on my right, Tavae on the left.

"Aue," Miri sighed as she breathed the cool air which drifted around us in the narrow lanes, "how I love this place!" And then, for the twentieth time that evening she assured me that never, never would she go away again - not to America or France, or Poland, or to any of the many other lands in which she had sung and danced and been much fêted and adored. She meant it at the moment, but though it did not strike me as a notion in the least strange, I knew better than to imagine her days of wandering to be over. As long as Miri's

beauty lasts, and as long as men of means and imagination pass through Tahiti on their ways across the world, there can be no certainty that the next week will nor find her en route for Paris or Prague or Saigon or whatever alluring spot you will. And yet never again, I think, will she be gone for long.

"Is it not too bad," she said suddenly, "that all people can not live here?"

Sometimes I have thought that such appears to be almost everyone's eventual intention. "Perhaps it is as well that they cannot," I told her. "We should be a bit crowded. And, besides, there are many who would not like it in the least."

"Are there?"

"Yes."

"Surely they would like Quinn's?"

"Most reasonably sane people would abhor it."

"But you are no more than a little crazy. *You* like it. Why?"

Why indeed? Whether Miri realized it or not, she had posed a difficult question and I searched for an answer as we went along.

No street lamps burned overhead, but here and there the open doorways of Chinese shops were faintly outlined by dim lights guttering somewhere far within. Into each of these I peered as if expecting to find a reply that might satisfy the girl. But all that I could see was an occasional naked babe creeping on the floor, a black-pajamaed woman, a gaunt dog, a man silently cutting shoe soles from a worn-out tire. We passed a darkened patisserie, a native blacksmith's, a Hindu restaurant through whose swinging doors there came a subdued mumble of voices and a bar of light to fall across the unpaved way. Behind us I could hear the faint scuffing of bare feet where the rest of our party followed. Except for a periodic and regrettable announcement from Punau, no one spoke and the quiet melody that Timi plucked from a single string of his guitar seemed only to accentuate the welcome hush. Perhaps it was the encircling Tahitian night which thus succeeded in momentarily subduing our so recently noisy company, the night which by nearly obliterating the disorderly little town brought near the brooding mountains at our backs and the silent sea toward which we walked. More probably Teuru and Tavae and all the others merely rested, gathering their forces in order to burst with the greater éclat into the cabaret. But regardless of its reason, the transient peace was palpable and real. High above, the under surfaces of scattered clouds were touched by the light of a moon that still hung low over the island's central crags, yet neither the moon itself nor the vaguely reflecting clouds served to lessen the thick, friendly darkness where Papeete hid. The jumbled tin roofs, the unlovely, close-compacted clutter of frame buildings with their peeling walls of yellow or white or blue, all were swimming shadows that mingled with the night. Now and then bicycle riders passed, indistinct ghosts with tinkling bells, briefly seen, then lost again. At an intersection a pair of bonito fishermen loomed before us with the day's catch swinging between them on a long, shoulder-borne pole.

"There was luck?" Timi inquired.

"Luck enough, thank you," one of them replied quietly, and in the next instant both were swallowed by the blackness that lay still more incense in the direction of the market.

But we had come to a place from which it was possible see the end of the street where it met the water's edge, there, in a sharply defined area, night did not exist. There bathed in the brilliance of high-swung arc lights, *Wairuna* lay squat and ungainly and serviceable against the wharf. Huge gnarled trees stood out in bold relief between us and the ship, yet we could see her clearly. We could hear faintly the rattle of her steam winches and see the loading nets swing from the dockside to drop within her waiting holds. *Wairuna* was our bond with all other Pacific lands and peoples - with Suva and Noumea, Christchurch, Wellington and San Francisco. But for all her faithful and stubborn regularity, what a fragile tie it seemed. For some reason the sight of her, the stolid emissary of a world of steel and power and machines, the sole busied, wakeful thing in a harbor of furled and sleeping sails, served only to bring home the more strongly our remoteness and detachment, our disinterest in, and our unimportance to, all that lay beyond the seas. Yes, ours still remains a lonely island, far from the paths that most ships ply, yet for *Wairuna's* visits we are grateful. Each time she brings to port an echo of the cities into which she's put her bows and stirs memories of the sort of life they hold. Any land, however fair, would begin to pall, I suppose, if it were long enough taken quite for granted, and this danger the old freighter helps one to avoid. Often I have been obliged to step aboard to let her carry me from south to north, and for each safe passage I am duly thankful. But what pleasure it is, when she has come to anchor, to be able to eye her with calm unconcern and to think, "Not this time, my friend; go on your way and let me be."

I turned to Miri. "Why do you go to Quinn's yourself?" I asked.

Miri had probably forgotten that it was she who brought the matter up in the first place. She smiled quickly. "I just like. No reason. It was the correct, the only possible answer.

We rounded a corner into the harbor-front drive, and in so doing left behind all that part of Papeete which was somnolent or decorous. Little more than a block away, glaring light spilled from the open doors of the famous cabaret to show a large crowd milling in the street. From the same doors there also issued a volume of sound so grand that it may appear strange that it had not sooner come co our ears. But, most mercifully for those of the town interested in sleep, the shape and situation of this palace of joy is such that its strident clam or is funneled out to sea where it disperses harmlessly in infinite space. I wish it were possible to describe the raucous composite voice in which Quinn's shouts down the endless halls of night striving, so it seems, with brave and puny defiance to make an impression upon the insentient darkened sky and the darker waters. One may isolate and identify certain sections of the weird cacophony, but the ebbing and swelling chorus of them

all is not co be imagined. There is the blare and bleat which thick Tahitian lips and strong Tahitian lungs wring from various horns of wood and brass; there is the infernal, ear-splitting metallic rattle produced by beating lustily with sticks upon cans that once held Crown or Union gas: there is the roaring and the high falsettos of vocalists possessed. Good for dancing? Only see the effect it has upon the mob who jostle on the barn-like floor and you'll know it is the best there ever was. But the music comes from the efforts of no more than a dozen earnest men. There are hundreds more to swell the orchestra of the whole and no single patron fails to add his quota. They are all inspired and each one will make his presence known. They stamp and shout and laugh and bang their fists upon the tables. Yet more insistent than all else is a rhythmic background of sound in which the tooting, the singing and yelling, the intermittent clatter of broken glass or the splintering crash of a faulty chair are blended, and it comes from the scrape of countless pairs of feet on thin-worn boards, from feet of sailors in their heavy shoes, of island white thong-tied sandals, of natives with naked calloused soles.

Arrived on the outskirts of the throng, we began energetically to elbow our way through the compressed bodies intent on entering where we might add, to the best of our abilities, to the general tumult. There are several reasons for the congestion in the street about the doors. One of these is that the bamboo-sided bar is a two-way affair built to cater to those on the outside as well as to those who have managed to force themselves in. Like a long and narrow house within a house, it has a separate roof of its own and it stretches the entire width of the building between the two flanking entrances. Here the jam is always fearful, and there can be no question that if the bar were solidly constructed it would fall before the massed assaults. But native materials, like native characters, are elastic; they bend resignedly before a storm and then, once the pressure is released, assume again their former shape. So, depending upon which way the tide of besiegers chances momentarily to flow the strongest, Quinn's fascinating bar lists inward or streetward like a ship doing valiant battle on the sea, and the rows of colored Christmas-tree lights strung along the eaves nod and sway most charmingly. Not everyone who remains outside in the night's fresh air is, however, fighting for a drink. Some have been ejected from the close interior because of an infringement of the management's rules. (The only rule that comes to mind is one forbidding women to pull each other's hair.) Some, happening to be without francs, are free to take the music that overflows for dancing and use the hard-packed ground of the street on which to do it. Still others are patronizing the many Chinese pushcarts from whose canvas awnings dimly smoking lanterns hang. The perambulating shops are clustered beneath the protecting, heavily massed leaves of ancient trees and on their counters, in cases made of window glass, are candies and cakes mangoes and oranges, French cigarettes, ready-husked coconuts to slake the thirst which other beverages produce. Generally, too, a pair of busy ice-cream venders are to be found taking advantage of the

lodestone that is Quinn's, but on the night of Miri's party the cry of only a single one was to be heard.

"Pape toetoe, pape toetoe!" he called incessantly while he slowly pedaled the tricycle on which the freezer was supported. What had become of his partner was suddenly explained when we had nearly gained the portals of the cabaret.

"Take care!" someone shouted in quick alarm. "Take care - it is Madame Telephone!"

I looked and did not at first see the lady in question, but in the next instant the missing second ice-cream outfit shot from the gloom farther down the street. It came into the more brightly lighted area in front of Quinn's at an amazingly rapid rate of speed, yet in fashion most erratic. It careened to graze the curb on the right, tacked and bore away abruptly for the left, then back again. Mrs. Telephone, I soon saw, was in command and the unfortunate owner raced along behind her futilely screaming shrill Chinese.

"Save yourselves!" a man cried hoarsely. "She is uaoti roa!" (Meaning that she was three sheets in the wind or, more exactly, "very finished.")

Past experience had taught the danger, and there was a con certed rush for the safety of the sidewalks from which point of vantage they quickly turned to shout encouragement and advice at the intrepid young cyclist and her luckless pursuer.

"Faster, madame, faster!"

"Run, little Chinaman, run!"

"It is the mousseu," Miri exclaimed, delightedly clapping her hands. "I am so happy - nothing is changed. Always when she drinks mousseu it is the same. Allez, chérie," she cried, "vite, vite, vite!"

Having gained the spotlight, so to speak, Mrs. Telephone went into a series of breath-taking loops and turns and figure eights, through all of which the puffing Chinese followed with a precision so admirable that he had the air of being drawn after her by an invisible cord. The shout of appreciation which greeted these intricate maneuvers was so loud that it was heard throughout the length of Quinn's. The band stopped playing and threw down their instruments, the drinkers dropped their drinks, the dancers broke apart and all made a dash for the street.

Interruptions of this sort were frequent in the course of an evening in Tahiti's principal night club, for in a land where the days have all a certain sameness everyone is concerned to miss no happening that may be even slightly out of the ordinary. The sound of two taxis tangling fenders, voices raised in anger or lamentation - or the mere rumor that something exciting or laughable is about to happen - is sufficient to empty Quinn's in a trice. At first I used to join in each pell-mell exodus as eagerly as the rest, but the alarms proved so often false that the time came when I no longer bothered. Today I remain seated in the empty place content to wait for the patrons to straggle back and inform me of what has been going on. It is a satisfactory procedure

in view of energy saved, and also because the report is almost certain to be far superior to the event itself.

I should have been disappointed, nevertheless, not to have witnessed Mrs. Telephone with my own eyes, hers being a performance to which not even the highly colored and imaginative words of Tahitians could have done justice. As the mob of spectators increased, so did her skill and daring. Dressed in white shorts and a Hawaiian print shirt, her small feet tucked into green sandals, she whirled about the arena bounded on the one side by Ah You's store and on the other by Quinn's. Her very blond hair streamed out behind, her slim white legs flashed on the pedals and, guiding the freezer-burdened velocipede with one hand, she raised the other to the enthusiastic throng, saluting them with the careless and slightly condescending grace of a circus rider. But unlike a silently smiling queen of the big top, Mrs. Telephone opened every few seconds her pretty red lips and with head tilted back proclaimed to the heavens, "Pape toetoe! Who will buy? Toss me your francs for pape toetoe!"

Miri lifted her voice to be heard above the peals of delighted laughter. "I will! I will buy!" She threw a coin.

"And I!" Timi exclaimed, following it with another.

"Et moi!" Teuru shrilled, happily flinging, not one, but several of the francs I'd given her for the morrow's marketing.

Apparently it was contagious. Of what use is money any way? What can it be meant for if not for sport? With a merry tinkling the metal disks flew from every hand. "Me too!" they all cried, and the money showered down like darkly tarnished rain.

In consequence the show came to an end, yet I think it was more likely sheer exhaustion than avarice which caused the little Chinaman abruptly to abandon the hopeless pursuit and to drop to his knees. That he then began methodically gathering up the coins which strewed the ground all about him was probably a simple afterthought, and a sensible one besides. Perceiving that the game was over, Mrs. Telephone allowed her steed to coast, and then, catching sight of Miri's face among the many, came to a stop before us-and jumped lightly off.

"Mini darling!" she exclaimed in glad surprise. 'You're back again!" They embraced affectionately and then Mrs. Telephone (whose name was Marjorie before she came to Tahiti with a man who wore an ear trumpet) held the girl at arm's length. "But you look younger than ever! How do you do it?"

"Men and absinthe," Miri acknowledged.

"Aren't you awful. We don't change a bit, do we?" She looked about vaguely as if she had forgotten something and her eyes lighted upon the Chinaman, who had come to take possession of his machine. She went to him, placed a dollar bill in his hand, and after kissing him lightly on each of his thin, parchment-colored cheeks returned to us. "Now let's go in before all the tables are taken and Bill will find us mousseu, won't you, chéri?"

I followed them, idly wondering if it was really nothing more than sparkling wine which caused Marjorie to put on such outrageous scenes on Quinn's doorstep. I had a suspicion that, far from spontaneous, her weird exhibitions were carefully, cold-bloodedly preconceived. She came to the cabaret. Every seat was filled. What to do? Why, empty the place then slip in before the slower-witted among the side-walk crowd have discovered that the curtain's down. Unconscious or planned, it was fine strategy and it worked: we found a vacant table, a low circular one about which were scattered a number of luxuriously comfortable frame and canvas easy chairs. We had, for the time being at least, become separated from the captain and the other recruits gathered at the Tiare, and after seeing that drinks were brought for Timi and Tavae, Teuru, Miri and Marjorie I leaned back prepared to allow matters to take their usual unpredictable course.

Tavae manipulated the cork of the bottle of mousseu, pushing it this way and that with his thumb till it burst out with resounding pop and sailed bullet-straight to strike the red neck of one of *Wairuna's* stokers, who sat around the next table in undershirts and dungarees.

He turned belligerently. "What the bloody ... ?"

"Pardon, m'sieu," said Tavae. "I am desolated; it is like that the mousseu, you know."

The fellow got up and came toward us threateningly. "Don't give me any of your parlez-vous."

He was big and fair and very young. Mrs. Telephone's clear blue eyes surveyed him speculatively, taking in the full chest, the hard midriff, the long wrestler's arms, and she put a hand to her hair to assure herself that it properly framed her pretty face.

The seaman bent and brought his sun-burned nose close to Tavae's. "Maybe somebody is lookin' to have his bloody block knocked off." These words Tavae did not, of course, literally understand but the tone in which they were uttered made translation quite unnecessary. My yard boy is not of warlike disposition; he prefers to be everyone's friend, and he glanced to me for help.

"It was an accident," I said. "No offense. You'd better have a drink and then go and sit down."

"And who might *you* be?"

A simple enough question one would think. But no answer came to me at the minute and we appeared to have reached something of an impasse when the young man's glance fell upon Miri and Teuru, both of whom were gazing at him very sweetly. Almost instantly his expression changed. He ceased to frown, the muscles about his jaw relaxed, he smiled, flushed, stammered.

"I say. What have we got here?"

"Tahitian women," said Timi, pouring a glass of wine and handing it to him.

"A little bit of all right, that's what." He emptied the glass, replaced it on

the table, hesitated while he looked from one to the other of us and then asked, "They belong to you blokes?"

"Nope," said Timi who always tends to wax needlessly loquacious whenever he has the opportunity to speak English. "They're free, brown and twenty-one; they got no permanent attachments."

"Blimey," remarked the young giant. And then, with charming diffidence, "Mind if I speak to 'em?"

Timi waved a hand airily. "Go ahead, Jack; this is a free country."

How free it is, Jack had already learned in a bare six hours ashore, and he soon made it clear that in the same short while he had also grasped the essentials of the local languages. He went to Miri's side.

"Haere taoto?" he inquired genially.

Miri shook her head, but smiled at the same time in so affable a manner that the sailor was obviously perplexed to know whether the sum total signified acceptance or rejection. He moved on to Teuru and repeated his question, giving try this time in French.

"Faire l'amour, mam'selle?"

Teuru did not shake her head but turned to Timi and began to speak rapidly and with apparent indignation in her own tongue. "Aue, Timi - how crazy they all are, these popaas! 'Make love, make love.' Do they think of nothing else? Whether they are little or fat or ugly or, like this one, handsome, big and tail, it is always the same. When is one to have any pleasure? We come to Quinn's to laugh and dance drink and be gay, and before we can begin to do any of these things it is here again: 'Haere taoto? Faire l'amour?' Tell him Timi, that I am fiu, *fiu*, FIU!" she concluded dramatically meaning that she was respectively "bored," "very bored," an "bored something awful." Well pleased with her little oration she then regarded the importunate young man from beneath long, demurely lowered lashes - a procedure having the effect of heightening, rather than hiding, the softly caressive quality of her eyes.

"What does she say?" he asked eagerly of Timi.

"She says later, maybe. It's early yet. Come back later on, Timi advised.

"Right you are."

"A good deal later."

"Righto."

"Along toward morning sometime."

"Right." He turned away. "Cheerio," he said over his shoulder, and in a now happy frame of mind went to join his fellow Aussies.

"Very nicely handled, Timi," I observed as we all relaxed. "He'll forget within the hour."

"It is possible," Teuru murmured with a faint smile of the sort that should be accompanied by a purr. "But I do not think he goes to forget."

Mrs. Telephone laughed. "Did you see? He didn't so much as look at me. What chance has a girl with these dark-eyed vahines?"

"None," I said. "You ought to take that milky white skin back to a country where it belongs." It was advice that, most fortunately, has never been accepted. Tahiti would be the loser if Marjorie should take her blond prettiness away. And, despite the competition, she gets on very well.

The orchestra had pulled themselves together and, taking note who made up our party, began the dreamy melody named for another Miri, but equally appropriate to ours. "Miri itie, here vau ia oe . ." Yes, as the lyric repeated, we all loved Miri, and for the moment the blatant racket of Quinn's was stilled. Though the music that rose in its stead was composed of many Polynesian voices, they were voices temporarily subdued, softened in keeping with the haunting air they sang. It was necessary only to close the eyes to be lifted from the shabby cabaret and transported to Tahiti's borders close to the sea, for Miri's song evokes as no other the spirit of her island. In it one hears the rhythmic swishing patter of warm rain, the ocean's slow and measured breathing, the whispered conversation of the palms-soothing, Lethean sounds in which I had quite lost myself when I was aroused by a determined pulling on my trouser leg.

Teuru was trying to direct my attention to three elderly dames who had come to stand beside us, their outstretched arms loaded with a marvelous variety of flower wreaths. "Heis are required," she stated.

This I had no need of being told, and as soon as I had nodded agreement Teuru rose to begin unburdening the three venders of their fragrant, dew-wet wares. She tossed a hei to each of us, and about Miri's throat carefully arranged first a long red and yellow wreath of purau and hibiscus blossoms, next a smaller one of delicate creamy jasmine, then crowned the raven hair with a circlet of Tahitian gardenias, purest white. She decorated herself as generously and paid the smiling flower sellers. "Thank you, old mother," she said to each, and took her place as the last notes of Miri's song faded diminuendo that left Quinn's cabaret in rarely experienced silence. The hush was brief and it was broken when friends by the many score rushed with glad cries to embrace the girl recently returned. Because no one else ever thinks of such matters, I wrapped both arms about the table hoping to prevent it, and the various glasses upon it, from being overturned.

When the crowd had thinned a little Miri turned to with eyes that glistened brightly. "Ah, Beel, it make me happy and so sad!"

"Dance, Miri!" someone called, and immediately the cited demands arose upon all sides. "A-ori, Miri, a-ori!"

Teuru jumped up, ran to the bar, dove behind it and came back waving a grass skirt which she thrust in Miri's lap. "Put it on, chèrie! Quickly, quickly!"

Miri turned the soft, whitely bleached mass of thin shredded purau bark in her hands, fondling it, pressing it her face, running her fingers over the brilliantly dyed tassels and the belt of beaded shells.

Teuru drew her by the hand. "Come, my little one. None of us has seen the true dance of Tahiti since you went away Come!"

Miri allowed herself to be pulled to her feet. "But of course I shall dance. I think I shall dance as never before. How can one help it when he is all full of happiness?"

Timi looked at her dubiously. "You are a little full of the things you have drunk, no?"

"Mamu," she told him pleasantly. "Shut up."

"Go ahead, then. But not à poil, eh?"

She held up the grass skirt. "How shall I be naked if I wear the ahu-more?"

"Yes, yes. But the little pants underneath - the little piripo there is no need to remove."

"Aue! I am fiu with piripo. Of what use can they be in Tahiti?" and with Teuru to help her don what little is required for the ori she skipped off to a room at the back.

"Well, mon vieux," Timi sighed when they had gone, "what would you? With the women one can do nothing. Let us drink."

Content though I was that nothing could be done, we clinked glasses and nodded at each other in solemn masculine understanding.

The floor was cleared. A dog that had curled up comfortably in the center of the place was kicked out yelping; a few stray drunks who wandered aimlessly were led to the side-lines. The band exploded into hurrying, feverish rhythm little short of demented. It was no puling Hawaiian music made of slithering steel guitars, but the solid, rapid-thudding, rump-shaking, blood-firing stuff that gives quick and joyous birth to a dance beside which the northern hula seems the epitome of sedateness and reserve. There is no withstanding the excitement that it breathes and it will not permit one to remain a calm bystander. It reaches out and grips each hearer roughly, relentlessly. It sets the heart swift-beating, feet will not stay still, without volition hands begin to clap. Every man and woman in the cabaret - and the scattering of tots who were always underfoot as well - was swept up in the same delirious contagion and fused into a single riotously enthusiastic percussive orchestra. Fortunately, Quinn's is far more sturdy than the venerable Tiare and well accustomed to such madly concentrated effort. Even so, the barn-like structure did not remain impassive but responded to the temper of its inmates with a sympathetic shimmying vibration that reached from top to bottom.

'There she is!" someone shouted. "La voilà, la voilà!" All eyes swerved to where Teuru was determinedly shoving people aside to make a path for her darling friend. A tremendous cheer went up as Miri burst out onto the floor.

Probably it is no wonder that music capable of stirring into something resembling life even a man like myself, whose forebears spent their days in chilly New England, should do far more for a girl whose roots go down in warmer soil. Miri was transfigured. It goes without saying that even in repose she seemed animated in comparison with the dull apathy in which so many a

Northerner appears permanently, leadenly sunk. But now, suddenly, she was become an utterly different girl beside which her more customary lightly gay self was tame and domesticated indeed. Doubtless it was the real Miri that the frenzied pagan drumming called forth, the Miri who at other times slumbered just below the surface and who now shone through the golden-glowing skin, savage, wild and free, clear for all to see. It was as if she reached back into the island's heathen past, drawing up its reckless fecund power, its untrammeled passions, its joyous lust for living, giving it all glad rebirth in her supple, weaving body, flinging it all prodigally before us so that each one who watched might breathe of, share in and take to himself a part of her boundless, over flowing vitality.

In the theaters of Europe and America, on the sets of Hollywood, Miri's dancing caused a furor and it is unlikely that many of those who saw her suspected that what they witnessed was a pale adulteration, a mere shadowy suggestion of the true ori-Tahiti. But on the impromptu stage of Quinn's there was nothing to dampen or inhibit, nothing to impose restraint, nothing to hide or dim the ardor and the intoxicating happiness which filled the girl that night. Like a high priestess of the love-worshiping sect called Arioi, she gave jubilant expression to the ancient mating rite remembered from a distant past, imbuing each sinuous, provocative movement with unabashed and forthright meaning that no onlooker might fail to comprehend.

The native language contains one word alone capable of expressing emotions deep seated as those which Miri's splendidly primitive and simple magic roused. From the lips of some it fell like an ecstatic whisper, from others like an anguished moan, and from still others as a shout of exuberant joy; but always the word was one. "Aue!- aue, Miri-e!"

Marjorie had gripped my wrist. "If only I could dance like that!" she exclaimed.

"To do so you would have to be Tahitian."

"How I wish I were!"

Our exotic Mrs. Telephone was far from the first to have such a fleeting wish. No foreigner could follow Miri as she began to circle the cleared space in the center of the crowded cabaret without a twinge of envy. Yet envy of things one cannot hope to attain is waste of time. And who of those not born upon Tahiti is capable of feeling so intense, of transport so complete as that which guided Miri's legs and arms through the swift patterns of her dance? Others may guess the sensations which run tingling through her, flowing from her finger tips and nimbly weaving feet-and that is all. But everyone white, brown, yellow, or black - can clap and cheer and sing. And so they do. Everyone can watch each move and gesture, imagining that she dances for him alone. And so, for each in turn, she does, hovering before this man or that while with eyes and lips and her whole self she makes him briefly partner in her siren game, then quickly, tantalizingly breaking away and moving on to seduce as merrily and wantonly the next.

Quinn's boasts no spotlight to train upon a performer who chances to take the floor, and in Miri's case, at least, none was needed. Since all eyes were fastened upon her with a fixity equal to my own, others must have been subject to the same illusion: Miri, one felt, sent forth a brilliance of her own. It was light which left the rest of the cabaret in shadow, illuminating only the girl herself and the features of those nearest her on whom it fell. But "illusions" is hardly the word. Too much was real. Though she had gained the far end of the building, I could see plainly the effect of the curious electrical magic that she spread. From the blur of the crowd the faces of those to whom she momentarily called became suddenly detached and distinct; they lightened, awakened, identified themselves clearly, shone for a few seconds in the reflection of her radiance, then slipped back into anonymity when she moved on to bring others into transient prominence. In this way Miri unrolled the cyclorama that was Quinn's, disclosing one after another the faces of the devotees of that temple of indecorum. And as in her dance itself, there was rhythm as repetitive and definite in the succession of portraits that she so displayed. Four or five or six brown skins swam into focus to be followed by one of contrasting, punctuating white, then by brown again. Always the color of Tahiti predominated and always at regular intervals it was interrupted by the pale cast of the north with here and there an abrupt off-beat - a sort of accidental, syncopated note of yellow or of black. Many of those in the passing parade were familiar or well known: dusky boys and girls from the district of Hitiaa where suns and rains are fiercest, fishermen from Haapape, the - proudly mustached chief of Punaaui, a thin, effete Dutchman of vast wealth and his fragile Austrian wife, a buxom Tahitian princess and a handsome, gray-haired, hopelessly infatuated French surgeon, a group of French sailors surrounding the native mistress of a temporarily absent Chilian millionaire, a German painter with childlike blue eyes and fair beard who loves to draw Tahitians with enormously exaggerated feet and rears, a direct descendant of Fletcher Christian of the good ship *Bounty*, a New Yorker who - disliking the island - doggedly stays on to write an unpleasant book about it, a retired American chemist and native mistress a retired British consul and native mistress, the owner of an Australian radio station and native mistress, an Italian sculptor who spends most of his time on the little island of Maupiti where men are strangely feminine. If there are elsewhere four walls that hold humanity so diverse as those of Quinn's I have never discovered them. Most numerous are the people of Tahiti itself. There are also tall, statuesque men and women of Rapa, where formerly the greatest warriors grew. There are darker-skinned, tougher-fibered folk come from the atolls where life has always called for struggle. There are others from Mangareva, the Marquesas, the Australs and forgotten Huahine, and in one thing only were they all quite the same. That was their enraptured submission to the spell of Miri's dance.

She had come near the place where we were sitting when Fati, who had come unnoticed to stand behind us could contain himself no longer. With a

tremendous, exultant whoop he plunged past us, overturning the table, sending its freight of bottles and long-stemmed glasses merrily crashing. A deluge of shouted advice, much of it of a none too delicate nature met him as he burst onto the floor. He threw himself into the dance and set out in pursuit of Miri with his great mass of blubber trembling like brown jelly. Miri's smile broadened, an added sparkle appeared in her eyes, the circlets of flowers which Teuru had bound about wrists and ankles moved with a new life, her firm slim legs flashed still more swiftly through the strands of the ahu-more which whirled about her as if caught by a playful breeze. So she drew Fati on, luring him, provoking him, promising unbelievable delights. And he was right after her fitting his movements to hers, replying to each abandoned invitation with proper male aggression. The musicians, the perspiring spectators, everyone soared to fresh heights of delirium.

Timi alone among the many appeared to watch with anything approaching calm. He leaned over and spoke in my ear. "You see," he remarked resignedly, "she is indeed completely à poil."

I was about to comfort him with the suggestion that it was all in the interests of Miri's art when, suddenly, he grinned broadly, let out a yell rivaling Fati's own, jumped from his chair and rushed out to bear down, madly dancing, upon Mini from the other side. It was the signal for half a dozen bucks to spring onto the floor, where they leaped into the frantic tempo set by the girl and then began implacably to converge upon her. Miri was trapped. There was no escape from +he circle of ardent tanes whose eloquent contortions brought them ever nearer, confining her movements to a smaller and smaller area. But the ori-Tahiti was never devised with thought for evasion. Rather, of course, its whole purpose was to give rise to hot pursuit and insure the final desired surrender and captivation. The drumming rose to a climax. With knees far bent so that Miri seemed tall beside them, the men pressed in, closer, closer till they formed a solid, pelvis-rolling ring about her, till at the final beat of the music she was unable to move to right or left, forward or back, and stood with arms above her head, body all aquiver. There was a second's silence when the music stopped, a second in which the dancers remained motionless, frozen in the postures the last note had cut short. Then they broke. Quinn's dissolved into a pandemonium of applause. Timi caught up his sister and carrying her back to us, deposited her in the chair beside me.

"Soon as you get your breath," he advised, "go put on some clothes. To sit around when you're covered with sweat is to catch cold."

Miri laughed at him. "You know a funny thing, Marjorie?" she said to Mrs. Telephone. "When I dance in Hollywood or Warsaw or Vienna I finish dry and cool. And the dance is what you think? - like breadfruit that is stale. But here, here where is my home, I take fire, I burn up, I am drenched like in heated rain. And the dance . .."

"Is thrilling!" Marjorie gushed.

"Is formidable," Tavae agreed.

"Is numero hoe," Teuru added, "number one."

"Is nave-nave," Fati stated, wiping his brow and clinching the matter by that word describing the moment of greatest joy which man and woman can experience.

"Is time to get moving," Timi reminded us. "We gotta lot of ground to cover before the sun comes up."

He was quite right, and Fati was waiting to roll up more kilometers on the taxi. Miri went to take off the dancing skirt and came back dressed in her closely fitting print. We picked our way through the broken glass that Fati's sudden eruption into activity had strewn all about us, and pushed out to the street where the touring car was parked near by. A number of people appeared to be waiting in it, and upon coming close I made out Captain Demming and his retinue, together with several others who had joined him for the sake of sociability. Unable to find tables in Quinn's, they had established themselves in the taxi, sure that sooner or later it would be out bound for equally entertaining places. They filled every seat, but no one minds a little crowding and they welcomed us warmly.

The captain slipped his bottle of Johnny Walker back into a coat pocket and wiped his beard with the back of a hand. "We meet again," he observed.

"Come," Rite urged. "Come quickly, and let us go to Lafayette."

"Lafayette!" the little boy echoed excitedly, and Punau added an enthusiastic bad word.

There were groans and squeals and laughter as we compressed ourselves into the old car. A large vahine whom I'd never seen before obligingly got off the front seat and stood while I slid under, then relapsed, heavy and soft, into my lap. Tavae and Timi folded themselves up on the floor in back with their chins on their knees. Our women sat on the captain and company. We had started forward when a hulking shadow loomed beside us and I heard Teuru's whisper, "Come, little one." Without further invitation the *Wairuna's* handsome stoker hurled his great frame into the tonneau where he lay like a stranded whale with his head supported by my bonne and the rest of him by Miri and Mrs. Telephone. Whatever may have been the reaction of those on the bottom layer, the girls were not displeased by the added burden. Teuru began smoothing back his blond hair, Marjorie and Miri put their arms about him to hold him securely.

We drew away from Quinn's, away from the tin-roofed town, and at leisurely, ambling pace set out along the seacoast road. All of us were infected witch the same languid calm. Timi's fingers brushed the guitar, but lightly; the others sang, but softly. More than likely it was again the night itself that held us subdued and half bewitched. The moon had climbed high above the mountains Aorai and Orofena. Its light slipped through the trees bordering the inland side of the winding road to throw blurred shadows across our path, while seaward it spread unobstructed, palely luminous, over the lagoons that we so closely skirted.

"Would you stop a moment, Fati?" I asked.

"Stop? Bien sur." He brought us to a stand and shut off the motor. The song died away. Timi laid down the guitar and for several minutes no one spoke. A half mile away the Pacific swells rode in, sounding their deep organ tones on the coral outposts, sending repeated tremors across the expanse of protected water - tremors that traveled on to end in little wavelets which, like pigmy, whispered echoes of the combers that gave them rise, lisped against the grass-grown shore. On its way out to the open sea, a cool breath of air touched our faces and set the fronds above swaying slowly, indolently back and forth across the faint-starred sky.

Soon we would continue the journey to the pavilion of Lafayette that stands hard by the bay into which, of all Tahiti's many, white men first sailed their clumsy ships. There, seated beneath colored purau streamers that toss in breezes no walls impede, we should listen to music made with strings and gourds. There some would dance, and all would laugh and chatter once again. Perhaps dawn would find us lying on the beach sands where Lafayette is planted, or swimming in the surf that comes dashing in to shore untamed by contact with a reef. Or we might by then have moved far on along the island's rim. There was no telling, and it was no matter. Miri's party was already a success and the pattern of the balance of the night could be left to unfold of its own accord. We had shaken off the sense of urgency that had sent us hustling in to town, to the Tiare and Quinn's. We had no appointments anywhere, and time was without consequence.

So we tarried while the slow minutes passed, feeling no need of speech or motion, content with looking, with listening. We turned' our eyes to the ocean, to the dim mountains, to the heavens where stars form harpoons, and fish, and siren women. We harkened to the muffled thud of a falling coconut, to the distance-softened sound of a fisherman blowing on a shell. We filled our lungs with the dark, gently stirring air.

"My Tahiti," Miri murmured just before we left, "you are the only land."

## X. *The Nature-Man Leads Off*

SOMETIMES I am tempted to wish my house of singing bamboo stood alone on Pirae Bay. Then, sitting in solitude, it might be possible to snare a serious thought or two and write it down. Then, however, there would be no excuse for inactivity. So it may, after all, be just as well that other dwellings dot here and there the long curve of the shore and that the humans who live within them have a way of coming at all hours to my door. These friendly neighbors - and I apply the term to the half dozen people whose homes face the same broad lagoon as mine - have among themselves, I am sure, a secret understanding the purpose of which is to insure that I be left alone as rarely as possible. They, and other good souls who come from farther afield, arrive by relays. When one leaves, another uses the foot bath, or ignores it, and enters. (I am speaking now, not of natives who, when the notion seizes them, turn up in droves, but of popaas of one sort and another.) By their daily, neatly staggered visits, I am spared the slightest prospect of ennui or industry, and am at the same time constantly reminded that the world is in all truth made up of a number of quite remarkable things.

Not the least remarkable of these is the nature-man. Tahiti has always had its sprinkling of faddists but most of them are not serious and, giving up after a brief struggle for originality, drift off to Provincetown or Carmel or Taos to slump once more into normalcy. Our fly-by-night nudist colony is an example in point. They have gone, leaving behind the flimsy excuse, "mosquitoes." But the nature-man is serious and has been going back to nature for ever so long.

He has his home down near the peninsula which shuts off my view of the glories of Matavai bay and, although I have never been to see it, it has been described to me. It consists of a piece of roofing iron some six feet by four which is propped against the thick trunk of a banyan tree - and nothing more. The house has the advantage of being movable and on one day may be found presenting its back to Papeete, the next to Honolulu, all depending upon the direction from which the wind or rain chances to be driving. When nights are

dry the nature-man curls up on the onion grass beneath his meager shelter, but in wet weather, so I am told, he squats upon his heels with his left hand clasping his right shoulder and his head buried in the crook of his arm somewhat in the manner of a roosting bird. Neither method appears likely to offer much in comfort, which may explain his very early rising. He quits his perch even before my hens do theirs and is the first living creature that I see each morning.

Upon awakening, I am obliged to cut short my lazy listening to the wind playing with the house bamboos and to shower briskly if I am not to miss the nature-man. Just why I should regularly go to such trouble is difficult to explain, especially so if it be understood that not once in all the years I have been a faithful witness has my strange friend's morning performance varied by an iota. Perhaps, then, my attendance upon him is merely habit and a silly one besides. But the fact remains that when, through simple sloth, or because of exhaustion following an affair like Mir's party, I turn out late and find the old fellow has come and gone it is cause for self-reproach. It is disquieting, the day is not like other days, and chances are that before it is over some other annoying irregularity will occur. To one who has a taste for order there is quiet pleasure to be found in the reliable uniformity with which the island universe turns. Certain phenomena appear at certain hours and then give way to others. Our natura as natives call him, is one of these phenomena - as much so as are heavenly bodies, winds or tides - and to see him on his prescribed beach-skirting path is to be assured that the day is well begun, that all is still as it should be with the world.

It has been pointed out to me that the natura is only mortal, that some morning he may not appear and never be seen again. Anyone, the pointer-outers suggest, would be a bloody fool to become in any wise dependent upon him. But I know better. When he goes to his reward, another will certainly come to take his place, for Tahiti is never without at least one of the species and more usually there are two or three.

He rounds the point in the early dawn before the sun has begun to burn efficiently. The sky and the waters beneath, not yet fully awakened to their daytime brilliance of color, glow with tender shades of blue and green. The air, however, is crystal clear, and as he circles the tip of the narrow spit of land and turns into our beach of moving sands he is briefly, sharply silhouetted against the vast level plain of the Pacific, which stretches away behind him to far-off Easter Island. At that minute he is perhaps a quarter of a mile away, but with the binoculars one can bring him near - so near and so distinct that it should be possible to discover the expression with which he greets the lovely bay of Pirae. But the nature-man is without expression. Instead he wears a beard. It is the finest beard I have ever seen and the most totally obliterating. It grows down to his chest and up to his eyes, but even these are fairly disguised and hide, like those of certain sheep dogs, behind the shaggiest of brows. He carries two rough hempen copra sacks, one slung over

his shoulder, the other (arranged with holes for arms and neck) covering his stocky body to the knees. A strip of the same dark brown stuff is wound about his head to form a turban with a peak.

Ten minutes or less would bring him to my door if he had no task to perform upon the way, for his stride, brisk and determined, bespeaks a man who knows where he is going and what he has to do. But his path is most zigzag, leading him back and forth across the sands from the water to the grass roots and the palms. Stops are frequent when the sack must be lowered and some article of interest stuffed within. So it is more nearly an engrossed half hour that I spend before he finally comes abreast. Because of the rather sharp slope of the beach directly before the house, all of the natura except the peak of the turban passes temporarily from sight. Here he lays down his morning's take and, with his eyes still upon it, backs slowly into the sea. This procedure brings him into view once more so that I am able to watch, and marvel at, the precision and modesty with which, as the water deepens, he lifts his primitive skirt so that its tattered hem always brushes the surface of the lagoon. When water and sack have risen to his armpits he halts and for several minutes stands motionless, peering over my rooftop through his bushy brows to some place in the inner fastnesses of the island. Presumably there is some meaning to, some reason for, this daily ritual. Possibly it is a period set aside for passive, lagoon-washed meditation a respite from the arduous business of beachcombing. Or the explanation may be more elemental. In any event, when he has finished, the natura comes out rapidly and forcefully. He pushes sizable waves to either side, plows whitely through the shallows and emerges with fresh vigor on dry land. Gathering up his burden, he climbs the shelving bank and sets bare feet upon the lawn. But even here he is not free to progress in a straight line for our final meeting at the front steps. There are more detours, more zigs and zags to come first. His eyes must be exceedingly keen beneath their cloaking overgrowth, for they lead him quickly, unerringly to each prize that happens upon any given morning to lie on the close-trimmed grass. Here he captures an empty sardine can which the cat has perversely carried from the bin beside the kitchen, there he spies and seizes a stray cork or beer bottle cap, a bit of paper, a drying flower wreath, a busted ukulele string, a comb of three teeth, a couple of chicken feathers. An untidy lawn it must sound, but not so once the natura has passed. I read recently in one of those books designed to stimulate more intensive living, that the collection of absolutely anything can have fascination. This lesson the nature-man has clearly learned without the trouble of reading about it, and I am perpetually amazed at the catholicity of his taste. Everything disappears into the sack. And where, I should like to know, does it all go from there? What has become of the splendid accumulation of the years? No one can say. Beside his corrugated iron lean-to there should be a mound large as the finest kitchen-midden. Yet the ground about his abode is clean-swept and shows no trace of litter or junk or treasure. It is one of those disturbing mysteries for which

these islands are so much renowned.

No less a mystery is the nature-man himself. Who is he? What is his name? Where did he come from? Few care, I suppose, and none shall ever know. It is impossible even to guess his nationality because of the blanketing, hirsute disguise - and because he speaks no known language, as I discovered when I once tried to engage him in conversation. He listened respectfully, politely, and then in a low voice said distinctly, "Glug." A learned friend has told me that glug is a Scandinavian drink, but because my remarks had concerned nothing more than the weather the natura could hardly have been referring to anything of the sort. So I am left with the impression that he uses a tongue all his own. He is very sparing with it. In fact, now that I come to think of it, I believe that single, sadly unmusical word is the only one his lips have ever formed in my hearing.

That our meetings are passed in silence is no cause of embarrassment to us and the reason is due partly to their brevity, but more to the mutual certainty we hold that neither could conceivably have anything worth saying to the other.

When the lawn is clean-picked he comes up to the house, dips his feet in the bath provided for the purpose, lifts the sack dress above his knees and sits down cross-legged on the steps where God dropped the washbasin. It is the signal for me to draw a chair into the doorway just behind him and a bit to one side, and to take my place in it. And there for a pleasant interval we remain, in silent communion, neither looking at nor, perhaps, even actively thinking of the other, but conscious all the same of a second presence and dimly, wordlessly grateful for it. At least so I imagine. I think in those moments we are tacitly agreeing upon the wonder that two people such as ourselves - two people sprung from Lord knows what divergent lands and circumstances - should become together on the small blob of earth lying south of the equator seventeen degrees and west of Greenwich one hundred and forty-nine. I think we are mutely congratulating each other on this purely miraculous accident, accepting the tenuous bond which chance selection of the same living-place causes to exist between us, appreciating the only other thing we have in common: the unquestioned intention to remain.

Having given us time to exchange and absorb these sentiments (by a sort of osmotic process, as I guess) the natura gives a sigh. Rather shyly, he puts out his hand and touches whatever offering Teuru may have managed to find and place for him on the steps. It may be an onion that he caresses, a potato, a hunk of French bread, a partly filled bottle of last night's punch, a fish wrapped in newspaper. Then he rises with the bit of food in hand, makes a gesture half salute, half pleasant forehead-knuckling, drops his prize in the sack where it joins the seaweed, sticks, shells and trash, turns and marches swiftly off across the lawn and down the beach, leaving me secure in the knowledge that another day has properly begun.

As a general rule I am permitted to cling to this conviction undisturbed for

only a short while before the Czecho arrives, moaning and groaning, to do his sincere best to dispel it.

The Czecho is one of those who ignore the foot bath; if he sees it at all he doubtless takes it to be intended for the myna birds. Morosely oblivious, he tracks sand over the clean, cool 'mats and the polished floor, and although at the first sound of his complaining voice Teuru comes from the kitchen with broom in hand and pointedly sweeps around him, he does not notice. Nor does he pay attention to the arrangement of the girl's features in a pattern intended to register indignation (an expression quite beyond her powers, anyway). He has already drawn a chair to the table where I am finishing my breakfast and is zestfully turning himself inside out for my inspection - a display interesting enough at the outset, but which has become progressively less so as the years of our acquaintance have dragged on leaving each cranny of his tortured soul tedious and familiar from long exposure. The Czecho is not, however, depressing. He takes infinite pleasure in his unhappiness. He could not do without it; it is practically all he has to live for. He reviews his appalling mistakes, his failures, trials and sorrows, his wasted life, with a relish and gusto that is positively irresistible. When I have finally got rid of him, it is always in an excellent and cheerful frame of mind that I turn to my work or to the next caller.

Since each of our morning conferences is keyed to the same dolorous pitch, I may select the one just past by way of ex ample of them all.

I was finishing a piece of toast which had been permitted to catch fire when Mr. Z, as he would prefer to be known in this chronicle, came in with his usual quota of black sand.

"Oh, oh, oh," he greeted me, "what a night, what a night. What a perfectly hellish night." He drew up to the table, put his elbows upon it, clasped his white thatched head in his hands.

I poured some coffee, lit a cigarette and then took up the cue. "What was the matter with it?"

Mr. Z lifted his head and then his feet which he placed on the rung that braces the wicker-bound legs of the table (this not to make it easier for Teuru to sweep under him, but for comfort). He tilted back his chair and turned to me with healthily pink cheeks. "What was ...? Really, sometimes I think you deliberately try to exasperate me. Sometimes I wonder what induces me to stop here when the very sight of you sitting there with that smugly complacent look on your face is enough to make my blood boil. How can you do it, eh? How can you indulge in such a hollow sham?"

"I can't help it" I apologized. "I feel good."

"Oh, my God, listen to him! He 'feels good.' " The Czecho slapped his forehead in despair of such a heinous crime, and I could see that on this morning he was in remarkably fine fettle. "I suppose you will be telling me next that you slept last night."

"Didn't you?"

"Not a wink." He was delighted. "Not a solitary wink. How shall a man sleep when no breath of air stirs, when mosquitoes enter by droves to sting his flesh and fill his ears with their maddening shrill whine? Sleep indeed! One can but lie staring into the quivering dark, slapping, cursing, listening, while the rats scurry through the roof sending down showers of thatch particles sharp as cactus spines upon his tortured body."

"You ought to keep a cat in the house."

"And will a cat eat mosquitoes?"

"You should not have built in the middle of a swamp where the trades fail to penetrate."

"Ah, me - oh, my - alas, alas, how true!" In mounting pleasure Mr. Z struck his good, solid chest several resounding blows with a clenched fist. "And to think that I was here before you or any other had raised a house beside this bay. What insanity, what a frightful mistake, what a fool! All my life I have been a fool. Never have I made a correct decision. Everything I have ever done has been disaster. When I first came all Pirae was to be had for the taking. But do you know what I did?"

"Yes," I said, knowing very well.

"I walked this beach till I knew it as thoroughly as the stupid nature-man whom you allow, for a reason altogether beyond me, to come grubbing around your property. Wearing a palm-leaf hat to protect me from the blistering sun, I tramped a hundred times from one end of Pirae's lagoon to the other. I examined each plot of ground that lies along it, inspected the view which each afforded, weighed carefully all the pros and cons. It was a difficult task, I assure you, for there was so much from which to choose. For weeks I floundered in wretched indecision, for weeks - haunted by the awful, plaguing errors of the past - I feared to make up my mind. And then, what do you suppose?" He flung wide his arms in a fine, expansive gesture and exclaimed triumphantly, "Then I selected the single pesthole that the entire district affords!"

"You certainly did," I agreed with a cheerfulness equal to his own.

"And there," he added, voice lowered and filled with serene content, "there I shall suffer through my remaining days."

"Undoubtedly."

"Ah, yes. Woe is me. Woe, woe." (Perhaps I should have mentioned earlier that, although the Czecho speaks in English, he has acquired the language almost entirely by extensive reading, which may explain his use of an occasional expression that is hardly colloquial today.)

I lifted the coffee bowl with three fingers and then set it down again. "Of course," I suggested, "you might move."

"Move? And find myself in situation still more miserable? No, I am sixty-one years old and I have done with moving. Besides, it would accomplish nothing. Do you know why?"

"Yes," I said.

"I will tell you," he replied jovially. "The mosquitoes are bad, yes; but their bite is insignificant compared to the stinging, worrying thoughts of a lifetime that has been one great blunder. The swamp air is unbreathable, yes; but never so suffocating as the shameful, crushing memories of a thousand egregious mistakes and as many dismal failures. These thoughts and memories," he explained, exuding satisfaction, "I cannot leave behind. They will always be with me, gnawing at my very vitals and my mind as well. Ah, what a burden they are! What an oppressive load to carry to the grave! But how could you understand? You cannot conceive how much a man of my years can have to remember. His body is no longer filled with blood but with a clamorous wind composed of all his recollections. They are million; they are more numerous than the cells which continue to give substance to his useless form. He can recall and recall and recall each thing he ever said or did. And what if each remembrance brings with it a searing pang of vain regret?" Mr. Z slapped his forehead, closed his eyes and allowed a luxurious shudder to pass through his sturdy frame. "Oh, misery," he intoned, "oh, black despair!"

I failed at this point to make a proper rejoinder because Teuru came in to show me the fish she had brought from market. It was a bonito large enough to feed ten people and I nodded approval. But the Czecho, having again opened his eyes, looked upon it with less pleasure.

"Take it away, my child," he said. "Do you not see that your master and I speak of important matters?"

"Nothing," she replied sagely, "is more import to Monsieur Beel than what he puts in his belly."

Neither of us being prepared to deny so evident a truth, Teuru left the room with the last word and the fish.

"Yes," Mr. Z resumed, instilling into his voice a poignant note of sadness, "comprehension is not to be expected from a man of your age. I waste my breath as I have wasted life. And why, Lord, why?"

I might have answered: "Because you are a nice old humbug de première classe." But to have pointed out this would have been a work of supererogation. Instead I looked at my watch, pushed my chair back from the table and remarked, "Well, my friend, time flies." Aside from its silliness per se, the remark proved unfortunate in that, rather than induce his departure, it set the Czecho off again.

"There," he observed, "you touch the marrow of all our troubles. 'Time flies,' you say as carelessly as you might say, 'My foot itches!' But consider what is implied. Just think of it!" We thought of it for a moment and then he went on with increasing verve. "Do you see the yawning pit? Ah, how often when I lie wakeful in the blackness of the night do such words come drumming at my temples: 'Time is passing, time is passing. I start up; I break out in sweat. 'Passing?' I think, 'It has gone!' Time for regret; there is still plenty of that."

Mr. Z let his chair bump down on all four legs and leaned toward me

eagerly. "Did I ever tell you that on several occasions I might have wedded pure, beautiful and wealthy women?"

"Yes," I said.

"Never shall I forget the fille Bata. Her family owned the town where I was born. Her father made me the most attractive of propositions. I had only to assent, to reach out my hand for the sweetest of brides. And what," he demanded with the customary slap on his forehead, "what did I do?"

You ran off with a barmaid."

"Even so. I left the town with a common creature who had an illness of the toes!"

"You are an amazing fellow."

Mr. Z smiled appreciatively. "I am fou, complètement fou. But that was only the first of my follies. What about Prague, where for the second time I cast my life down a sewer? You should know about that to understand to what heights of idiocy a man may rise."

"I do."

"Anna was her name. Ah, Anna, what has become of those dark, glowing eyes that used to rest on me so tenderly? Where now is the delicate body that I might so easily have held and treasured forever as my own? At the lift of my finger Anna would have followed me across the world. With her beside me I should have taken life by the throat, I should have battered down every obstacle. I should have laughed at failure and have conquered. But I did not lift the finger. Instead" - open palm colliding with broad brow - "instead what madness seized me?"

"You seduced her fille de chambre and departed the country."

"Exactly. I went to Paris, and in Paris ... "

"In Paris, Celestine."

"Have I mentioned Celestine?"

"Yes."

"Well there, if you will, was a woman. From every point of view she was a woman. The perfect mate for a man of my temperament. We were sincerely devoted to each other. We became engaged. Père Montluc, who was a politician of eminence, desired a wedding the most elaborate. All was arranged. Then, on the day but one before the ceremony, on the day but one before the consummation of my happiness and the joyous, successful determination of my life" - loud thwack upon Mr. Z's durable forehead - "name of a pipe, what transpired?"

"You fought a duel over a notorious actress and fled from France."

"To be sure."

"Always, it seems to me, you have allowed women of a certain type to lead you about by the nose."

"Alack, alack," Mr. Z groaned gleefully, "always it has been so. Always I have been helplessly led but not, perhaps, by the nose. But to resume, from France I made my way to Venice and to the most devastating affair of my

career. What would I not give to be able to drive Teresa Juvenelli from my mind! But thirty years have passed, and I cannot. The perfume of her youth still clings to me. Perhaps I may have spoken of this, the most harrowing of all the memories that swarm within me shouting their reproaches and engulfing me in black remorse."

"Uh-huh," I said absently, my attention having strayed to a brown female figure corning toward us along the beach - a figure clearly recognizable even in the distance as that of Peti, the slight, flashing-eyed, tempestuous, hip-twitching lass who was Mr. Z's little friend of the moment.

Unaware of the approach of the unpredictable and often violent object of his more immediate ardors, the Czecho continued to probe and prod and disinter the past. "How I loved her," he moaned ecstatically. "A man of your phlegmatic nature could never imagine passion of such intensity, emotion so consuming. It was the divine fire which a man may find but once, and which many never discover or even suspect at all. Signora Juvenelli was the widow of a naval officer who inadvertently tripped at the top of a companionway and descended on his head to the steel deck below. In all Venice there was no woman more desired, more sought, yet she had eyes for me alone. Can you believe it? For me! And did I accept the eternal bliss she offered me?" The Czecho closed his eyes, flung out his big hands far to either side, then brought them fiercely down upon his head which he rocked vehemently this way and that. "Instead," he wailed, "what did I do?"

"Instead," I replied heedlessly, "you decamped with a laundress."

"Ah, no!" he corrected quickly. "A negress." He looked at me with reproach.

I detached my attention from Peti who had come to within a few hundred yards of the house, and apologized for my confusion of two distinct episodes in Mr. Z's life.

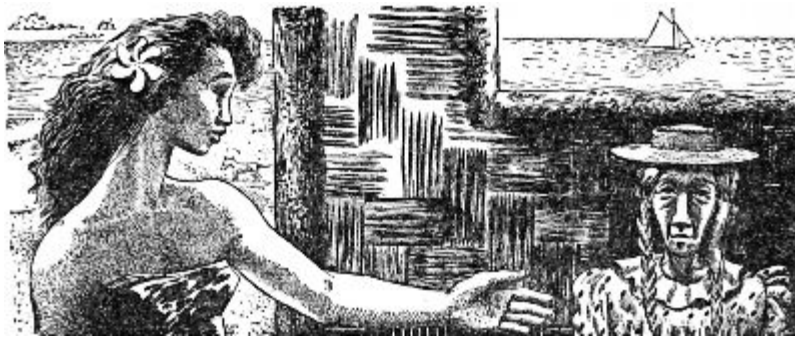
"Never mind," he said generously. "What does it matter? It is always the same thing. Even upon this island it is the same. I might well have married Madame d'Argentlieu of the extensive vanilla plantations, if it were not for these distracting Tahitian women who will give a man no peace. Ah, that Peti! I can do nothing with her. She is incorrigible. And such a temper! Yesterday when I tried to reason with her that by her persistence in sleeping at odd intervals with my best friend she will disturb the pleasant relation he and I have enjoyed, she threatened me with a knife. She threw the furniture out of the house and left me with nothing to sit upon. What a bitch she is! What a perfect little brown bitch..."

"Beetch?" Peti stood in the doorway. Her clear, light hearted laugh sounded in the house and Teuru put her head out of the kitchen and, for no reason whatever, laughed as merrily. Then Peti came in and took Mr. Z by the hand.

"Come, old man," she said. "I want you."

He rose obediently. "Goodby," he said to me. "Goodby until tomorrow."

They went out across the lawn and down to the beach. No longer clasping hands, they turned in the direction of the Czecho's swamp. Peti walked a short distance ahead, her step youthful and springy, her hips making supple undulant movements. And drawn securely after her, his tread less springy, a little stiff, but still determined, followed Mr. Z.



## XI. *While the Puta-Puta Gathers Dust*

AFTER THE NATURA and the Czecho have come and gone there is sometimes a lull before the procession continues. But on the recent morning I have begun to describe, Jean Gaillard must have been watching for Mr. Z's exit, because I had no more than transferred myself to the desk when his polite knock sounded.

"You work?" he inquired considerately.

"Jamais," I told him with a good deal of truth. "No, no. Entrez!"

With a regard for island etiquette befitting a hero of the First World War, a member of the Legion of Honor, a linguist, explorer, epicure and man of letters, Monsieur Gaillard left his sandals beside the steps and then entered on clean, bare feet. He shook my hand warmly - warmly as if twenty-four weeks rather than hours had passed since our last encounter. He seated himself, crossed his thin legs, and with long, sensitive hands delicately inserted a cigarette in an ivory holder.

"A little fire?" I held a match.

"You are too kind." Monsieur Gaillard exhaled gently, touched his dark, silkily smooth mustache with a slender index finger, and bent his cool glance upon me. "Well, mon petit, how have you been?"

No hero, I am nevertheless considerably larger than Gaillard and have none of his apparent fragility. No matter. I am his "little one," and the state of my health is always his first polite concern. "Fine," I said, and then watched for the faint, barely perceptible shadow of disappointment to pass over his fine features. "And you?"

"For myself it is forever the same. But, I live, as you know, with intelligence."

That Monsieur Gaillard considers my own manner of life completely lacking in intelligence I know only at secondhand. In my own house he confines himself to the neat, unemotional dissection of our mutual acquaintances, and it is only beneath other roofs that my turn comes to be laid

upon his mental operating table and drawn meticulously apart.

"Evidemment," he said with a graceful gesture of a nearly transparent hand, "I am not naturally robust as are most of you Americans. With the old families of France it is not so. And yet," he added with a quiet smile, "I was able to serve with some small distinction throughout a terrible war."

I returned his smile to show appreciation of the humor implicit in such a gross understatement. For, although in his homeland Gaillard's history and origins appear to remain unaccountably and regrettably obscure, in Tahiti his exploits in la guerre are nothing short of legend. It is legend that has grown bit by bit through all the years of his residence among us until it has reached truly awe-inspiring proportions. The fact that it is all of his own careful building makes it no less grand or real. It is, you might say, a living monument that Gaillard has painstakingly reared. And - which seems most worthy of remark - this noble conception of himself has all sprung from seeds so small as to be almost unnoticeable. Never let it be said, however, that the gentleman is a braggart. Far from it. He is incapable of such a lapse from good taste. He is equally incapable of anything resembling a flat statement, claim or assertion. The thing is done entirely by subtle nuances of the voice, by suggestion, indirection, by a smile at the proper moment, a frown at another, even by a silence accompanied by slightly lifted brows containing the implication: "But why should I say more?" Even the dim-witted or largely inattentive come eventually to recognize and accept Gaillard the-hero, Gaillard-the-savior-of-France, Gaillard-by-Gaillard. How can they do otherwise? Consider monsieur's tireless, insidious persistence, consider his life devoted to propagation of the fable and the whole thing becomes clear. Every minute of his day that is not spent in reducing the stature of others goes into industrious augmentation of his own.

"What I accomplished at Verdun was not done with muscle and brawn." He tapped significantly a blue-veined temple. "In the midst of those never-to-be-forgotten times I lived, even as I do in these days when I enjoy a perhaps not wholly unmerited rest, with intelligence."

"Surely," I observed, "no man was ever more deserving of his rest."

Monsieur Gaillard permitted himself a mildly deprecating smile. "You embarrass me," he protested with charming modesty. "However, it may interest you to know that our beloved Marshal Foch spoke to me in words almost identical to your own at the time I left the service. Those are things one does not forget. But we were speaking of health and I am reminded that the same great and good man frequently advised me on the subject. 'Take care of yourself, my dear Gaillard,' he would implore. 'France could ill afford..... It would be an evil day if... None could replace.....'" My visitor allowed the vague quotation of his fellow hero to fade away into thin air and to remain suspended there close beside us, illusive, unsubstantial, and yet tremendously impressive, for several moments. Then, satisfied that I had absorbed the idea, he allowed himself to glance in the direction of the kitchen where Teuru could

be heard juggling some pots and pans.

He leaned toward me suddenly and placed one of his pale, slender hands lightly on my knee. "Are you aware," he asked in the nicely modulated tones that make of whatever language he speaks a delight to the ear, "that your bonne is Lesbian?"

If this bit of information had come from anyone other than Monsieur Gaillard I should have been unable to repress a hearty laugh of the horse variety. In his refined presence such unmannerliness would have been unthinkable. And there was, besides, the fear that a laugh of any explosiveness would blow the frail creature from the house. I had to content myself with a grin. "No," I said, "it's news to me. What makes you think so?"

"Oh," he remarked airily, "it is common knowledge along the beach."

"Really? Well, exactly where did you pick it up?"

"My dear friend," Gaillard protested, drawing himself up with a certain primness, "I am afraid you ask an indiscretion of me. My honor does not permit me to tell you the name of my informant. Suffice it to say that it was a person in whom I have the utmost confidence. I trust him as I do myself."

Since the person and Gaillard were indubitably one, nothing was to be gained by further inquiry. And almost without pause my visitor's mind had skipped quickly, nimbly on to a fresh theme.

"Have you heard what they are saying about Z? Now, I beseech you, do not ask me who is saying this disgraceful thing for I could only answer 'everyone.' There can be no question about it. The mere sight of him leaving your house this morning was enough to convince me of the truth of the report. Did you not notice with what abject docility he followed his mincing little paramour? Oh, yes, she has him properly wrapped about her finger and makes him an absurd cuckold into the bargain. Incidentally, I shall never understand what induces you to bring so ridiculous an individual under your roof. And yet he is but one of many whom you allow to make of your pleasant home a hotel, a forum, a confessional. I could not count on my two hands the number of the worthless tribe you permit to impose upon you. Why do you let them rob you of the precious hours? What of your work? What of your writings?"

Monsieur Gaillard, when speaking to others, has often referred to my writings - not, perhaps, altogether inaccurately - as "hen-tracks," so I was not misled by his apparent concern and merely nodded to show that he had my attention.

"You should budget your time, my friend," he insisted. "You should place limits on the number of your callers. You should make it plain that certain people are unwelcome."

The advice was not, of course, even well intentioned, yet I suppose my mentor of the moment never suspected that if I were to do anything so foolish as to attempt discouragement of visitors, Jean Gaillard would be the first to go.

"But to return to the Czecho," he continued, inserting in his holder another

Week-End cigarette (goût Anglaise). "It seems the fellow has cast off the last shred of manhood which he still possessed. Imagine if you can - he is no longer master of his own house. He has allowed his poule to assume the trousers, and to sit laughing and smoking with her friends while she orders him about. Yes, your fine Mr. Z is on his hands and knees to that little strumpet, and I speak both figuratively and literally. He scrubs the floors, he washes the dirty linen, he cooks the food and serves her at the table. And all for what?" Gaillard emitted a fluttery laugh. "Delicacy seals my lips. But tell me, is it not incredible?"

"Of course it is. I don't believe a word of it."

"Not a word?" Monsieur Gaillard smiled, unruffled. "Oh, come now. You cannot mean that. You must admit, knowing the Czecho as you do, that such a surrender to - what shall I say? - to feminine charm is not altogether impossible in his case or even improbable."

If there had not come an interruption I should have had to admit that there was a bare possibility that the yarn might be true. And there lies the insidious thing about the fanciful tales which Monsieur Gaillard concocts and disseminates up and down our beach. They carry just enough of plausibility to assure their prompt adoption and broadcast by the ever alert, ever busy coconut radio.

Before the hero of Verdun could transfer his attack to yet another inhabitant of Pirae, he saw from the corner of an eye that Maître Raoul Lebon, followed by two husky Tahitian youths who carried his enormous painting and the easel, was approaching. In consequence Gaillard rose in nervous haste. Yet even in a disagreeable crisis he is not a man to forget his manners. However rapidly, my hand was duly shaken.

"A demain, mon petit," he murmured and stepped quickly to the door where he scooped to slip deftly into his sandals. He straightened and gave me a gracious parting salute. "You will excuse me, my dear. I must observe the injunctions of our beloved Marshal. Said he, 'Gaillard, choose your associates. Gaillard, do not demean yourself. Gaillard, remember...' " Because the little Frenchman was already scurrying away with light bird-like step I missed the rest of what his great compatriot would have had him remember. Only a few isolated words ("honor""position" "breeding") drifted back to me, and the lase of these was drowned out by bubbling, hearty, warming laughter.

The laughter came from Raoul Lebon, who arrived in the doorway mopping his wide, florid face with a large, brightly colored handkerchief. His paunch shook merrily and caused the tattered faded blue pants that rode so low upon it to flutter and flap. "That pitiful crapule again!" he chuckled. "What has he been pouring in your ear this morning? "

"The usual. Is it too early for a beer?"

"Too early? For what do you think I have come? Teuru!" he called peremptorily. "Here is your Uncle Raoul dying of thirst."

"Yes, yes," came the delighted answer."Immediately!

Maître Lebon subsided on the steps and leaned his back, to which a silk shirt of flaming yellow clung damply, against the door-frame. He removed the wide, floppy brimmed, native woman's hat which, regardless of the gleeful gibes of children, he unabashedly wore, and fanned himself with it. "Now," he directed the youths who waited with their burdens resting on the ground, "set up the easel under the purau tree close to the shore and arrange it as usual so that I may work facing Moorea. Then go around to the kitchen and refresh yourselves."

"Very well, Maître," said the older. "We will first place the picture and then, knowing the goodness of Monsieur Beel, we will go and look in his icebox."

I had joined artist Lebon on the steps, and after depositing two tall glasses between us Teuru poured from the large bottle of bière Aorai.

"Thank you, my child," said Lebon gratefully. "Now let me give you a kiss."

Teuru complied with pleasure, bending to present her smooth brown cheek and receiving upon it a loud, lusty smack.

"Delicious," Lebon pronounced. He quaffed his beer and with the back of a hand wiped suds from his wide mouth. He sighed. "Delicious also," he observed and extended the glass for Teuru to refill. "Do you know, my little cabbage," he said looking up at her with twinkling eyes, "I should like to steal you away from this ill tempered fellow. You are too good for him. How would you like to come to Uncle Raoul, eh?"

"Quelle blague!" Teuru exclaimed appreciatively.

"It is no joke," he replied with what seriousness he is capable. "A girl like you should not be sweeping and dusting and cooking and cleaning fish. She should spend all her time in stringing flowers and entertaining a man who is worthy of her."

"But I like to clean fish," said Teuru.

"You prefer it to l'amour?"

"Ah, non," she objected. "I like also to make love, but the two things cannot be done at once and must be enjoyed separately."

"Name of a name," Lebon roared, "they are priceless!" Laughter got the better of him and his paunch shook so that he was obliged to support it with both hands. When he could speak again he wagged a plump finger at the girl. "I warn you, mademoiselle, I shall carry you off one of these days. I am not content with a single kiss each morning, and that on the cheek besides. Shall I make a confession? You have an aroma that I find irresistible! It haunts me. But who shall describe the mingled scents that your admirable body breathes?"

"It is good?" she asked uncertainly.

"Marvelously good."

Teuru smooched the pareu on her hips and looked at her admirer coyly with dark head on one side. "Then tell of it," she urged.

"B'en, let me see .... " With his rather pendulous lower lip puckered between thumb and forefinger, eyes rolled up ward to the eaves, Maître Lebon sought for words. Soon he found them. "Very well, chérie. I shall try to explain. It is made up of a number of things. First, and most important, is an altogether indefinable odor in which all the others are set. I may say it forms the foundation for the other scents and of them all it is most personal to you. It has no name. [A faint frown of perplexity appeared on Teuru's brow.] It has no name because it is simply an exhalation of warm flesh. [The frown assumed a slight tinge of annoyance.] It is, in fact, the odor of a young, strong, healthy, female animal."

"Oh," she exclaimed indignantly (the frown having grown quickly dark), "it is not pretty what you say!"

"Not pretty? Indeed it is. Nothing is more attractive than health and youth. But be patient. Let me finish. There is much more."

"I wish no more! 'Animal' you have said. I shall go," she stated with lips that began to tremble.

"Now, now," Lebon soothed, recognizing that tears would soon follow if the situation were not speedily repaired. "Pay no attention to an old paint-dauber's clumsy way of speaking. But listen. There cling to you fragrances galore. [The furrows in Teuru's brow shallowed perceptibly.] Through the heavy, drowsy scent of coconut oil I catch the tingling, enlivening, briny flavor of the sea. [A smile came to touch the corners of her mouth.] I detect the perfume of many flowers. [The smile widened and added color crept into her cheeks.] I am reminded of gardenias, of white-petaled tiare. [Her teeth flashed white as the flower-of-Tahiti Lebon mentioned and beneath the even pigment of her skin the blush swiftly deepened.] Yes, yes," he hurried on, overjoyed at his success, "there is the perfume of mountain ferns and grasses, of wind brushed aeho cane, of lilies, of jasmine, of pitate. And finally," he added triumphantly, more than a little carried away by his own eloquence, "finally there is a thing which, by its presence and its contrast, heightens and makes more ineffably sweet every other scent that surrounds you, ma fille. That final thing is faint but not to be denied. It is the charming and unmistakable odor of *fish*."

The thought of so many good smells - and all of them attributed to herself - was almost too much for Teuru. She put hands to her flaming cheeks and swayed as if near to swooning with pleasure. "Ah, Uncle Raoul," she sighed, "what beautiful things come from your mouth! You are truly the best of men."

Raoul chuckled contentedly. "Of course I am. Now fetch another beer like a good girl and then go away and leave us."

When Teuru had followed out these instructions we stretched our legs for some while in silence. After a dose of Monsieur Gaillard, Raoul Lebon is at once restful and refreshing. His belly-rippling laughter, his complete lack of pretense, his frank enjoyment of the island and all its people make him everywhere beloved. Gaillard alone avoids him, flees from him, detests him.

And the reason for that is not hard to find. For it so happens that Maître Lebon is a genuine vieux combatant and a genuine hero, in consequence of which he still carries assorted chunks of shrapnel here and there within his chubby person. He much prefers to evade the subject but, if sufficiently driven, is forced to admit that Gaillard's descriptions of various events of the great war leave him with the painful conclusion that his countryman cannot possibly have shared in any of them. It seems, furthermore, that in the early days of their acquaintance - that is, before Gaillard had gotten seriously to work upon his legend - he thoughtlessly let fall some remarks permitting of a single interpretation: namely, that he spent the war years in a Swiss village composing verse.

"Well," said Raoul, putting aside his empty glass, "now that I have had my daily fling at seducing your excellent bonne, would you care to inspect the painting?"

No reply was expected because this, too, was unvaried ritual. Raoul put on his woman's hat and we walked out to the place where the boys had set up the easel. There he bent to rummage in the box at its feet and then straightened with palette and brushes in hand. He pushed back the floppy brim of the hat and gazed affectionately at the majestic canvas, then sighted past it toward the island of Moorea which lay basking within its belt of reefs on the other side of the channel. Satisfied that the view was unobstructed, he turned to me.

"How does it look to you this morning?"

Having learned long ago that Maître Lebon draws his inspiration from the fairy island rising from the sea nine miles away, I let my eyes linger upon Moorea for several moments before transferring them to the sprawling canvas which sought to depict something else entirely. The scene which was there spread out on so grand a scale had, as a matter of fact, nothing to do with contemporary island life. Lebon realized when he first came to Tahiti that if, in the fashion of the ordinary run of artists, he selected a simple land- or seascape or found himself a living model, such a project would arrive at an inevitable and all-too-quick completion. It would be done and he would be left at loose ends with the disconcerting prospect of hunting fresh material all over again. That he has today a painting that will never be finished so long as he has a single co-operative friend goes to show with what care he made his final choice of subject. Raoul decided to interpret an event about which neither he nor anyone else could have any knowledge - an event thought to have taken place five hundred and thirty (or one thousand and thirty) years ago. The title of the picture describes it about as well as words can hope to do: "Landing of war canoes at the temple of Tapu-tapu-atea situated by the sacred city of Opoa on the island of Raiatea otherwise known as l'île sacrée."

"Not so good this morning, eh?" Lebon inquired hopefully.

I rubbed my chin speculatively and then, for the sake of variety, altered my customarily obliging verdict. "On the contrary, Raoul, it looks pretty good today.....pretty good."

"Zut! You don't mean it!"

"Yes. On this morning your painting has a certain air that I have not remarked before. An air, I might almost say, of fulfillment."

"Impossible! Unthinkable!" Raoul's moon-face sagged.

"Yes," I persisted cruelly, "I really believe your labor of years is rewarded and that the result is practically beyond improvement. It is almost perfect."

"Bon Dieu!" he exclaimed, now truly alarmed, "You joke. It is a leg pulling, eh?"

I shook my head.

"No?"

"No."

"But you have said 'almost perfect.' " Raoul was grabbing for straws. "You have then seen *something* that is incorrect, *something* that is not as it should be... ?"

Finding it painful even briefly to cause Raoul distress, I gave in and got into step. "A few very little things, perhaps."

He expelled his breath noisily, drew out the bright handkerchief and mopped his florid face and throat. "What a turn you gave me! I shall never learn that three-fourths of an American's words are purest blague." He chuckled. "Well, come now. Let us begin. What requires change?"

I pointed to the nearest and largest of the many canoes with which Raoul's canvas was littered. "First of all, take this war canoe."

"Yes?"

"I am afraid that in the ancient days they were not built so."

"Good," said Raoul. "Fine. We will paint it out and start over."

"Not the whole thing. Just the stern."

"Oh, just the stern." He tried to cover his disappointment.

"The authorities, as you know, are not in accord, but as I look at it this morning I feel the stern should be higher than the bow."

"Agreed, agreed." Raoul did not, of course, remind me of the number of times we had raised or lopped off first bow then stern on the vessel in question.

"Now about the sacrificial victims whose bodies are being used as rollers for dragging the canoe ashore. Have you reason to think they were dead before they were thrown beneath the hulls?"

Maître Lebon scented a major operation. "You mean?" he asked eagerly.

"I mean it seems more likely that the unfortunate devils were much alive, and that your work would be more authentic if it showed them struggling and crying out in agony as they're ground into the coral."

"Splendid! Why could I not have thought of that? Mon cher, I do not know what I should do without you. And what else?"

"Obviously there is a serious omission."

"Ah! I have forgotten something?"

"Blood."

"But of course, of course. I shall add it generously. Nautrally, there should be a river of blood."

"That ought to keep you occupied for the rest of the morning." I started away.

"A little moment," he pleaded. "Find me just one more. One more small thing and then I permit you to return to your desk."

The day will surely come when I shall be at my wits' end with nothing to offer but the ultimate suggestion that he toss the whole masterpiece into the sea. But as he led me back to confront once more his perennial brain-child my eye lighted upon an actual and grave error in the painting so that, on this occasion, I was saved the need of further invention.

"Very well, Raoul. One more thing and then I must go."

"Understood, mon cher."

"Just look at this idol, this tiki, which looms so large in the foreground."

"You don't like it?"

"I do. And I am sure it was merely carelessness or laziness on your part - and never modesty - that makes it necessary to inquire. Of what gender is it?"

He removed the floppy hat and rubbed the top of his head. "Well, if you will look closely ... "

"But plenty of tikis still exist today. You have seen them and studied them. Does one have to look closely?"

Raoul's hand came to a stop on his head. His eyes widened in comprehension. Then he slapped the hat vigorously against his thigh and burst into hearty laughter. "My God, you are right. Thank you, thank you. I will give it the genitals of a bull!"

I left him chuckling as he briskly mixed his paints. The sun was already high, the freshness of the early morning gone, and I found that any intention I may have had to sit at the typewriter had become dissipated. A swim would be better. I entered the house and started for the bath to change into trunks (a pareu always parts company with a white man in the water) and was half way across the living-room before I caught sight of the old lady.

She was seated cross-legged on the floor close to the desk with the tips of her bare toes showing beneath the folds of a black mother-hubbard. On her head was a stiff-brimmed plaited hat, also black. A single long braid of gray hair was brought forward over her shoulder and fell all the way to her lap where two hands rested, turned palms uppermost. We looked at each other and she smiled and nodded in welcome.

"Teuru!" I called.

"Yes, monsieur. I am busy. I make the salad."

"Who is this?"

"Oh. It is somebody's grandmother," she replied over the partition.

"What does she want?"

Teuru came in wiping her hands. "She wishes to see you play the puta-puta."

"Well, that's too bad. I am through playing the typewriter for this morning."

"But you have not even begun."

"I know!"

"Have you not said that if you do not cause it to sing, we shall be without money? Do not make us sad by allowing the puta-puta to stand always silent." She drew me to the desk and then, by a gentle but steady pressure, pushed me down in the chair. "Be nice and play a little."

I looked from Teuru to the old lady who sat quietly, interestedly expectant with her head bent slightly forward. I put my hands on the keys. In Tahiti, compliance is generally the easiest thing. Rapidly, three times over, I rattled off "this is a simple of the wrk done on thiss machine" and then arose.

The old lady got up, too. "Mea maramarama," she observed. After placing the braid of hair over her shoulder so that it hung down the middle of her back, she padded softly across the floor and out of the house. I watched her till she had passed from sight around the corner.

"What did she say?" I asked.

"She says," Teuru explained on her way to the kitchen, "that you are greatly enlightened."

## XII. *Report from the Beyond*

THE SPIRIT WORLD is today less in evidence in Tahiti than was the case in former times. It is necessary to travel to islands farther removed from the skeptic influence of whites if one has a hankering after spooks clearly audible and visible. But even here it is possible to see somewhat foggily into the mysterious beyond and to converse (in a fashion very stilted) with the Polynesian dead.

Until rather recently many an informal seance was held . beneath my own rooftree, and if I had not one night assumed, on a sudden impulse, the role of medium they would doubtless still continue. But because I failed to mind my own business they have stopped, and Simone - a rather unprepossessing girl of Teuru's age and Pirae's première clairvoyante - does not come to the house any more. One should foster, and never discourage, a harmless occupation which can hold Tahitians quietly, intently engrossed for hours on end. Hardly an evening passes that a group of natives is not chez Beel, and now that Simone holds aloof they have turned to noisy and distracting games - a circumstance for which I alone am to blame. This would appear, therefore, to be an account of an other mistake in a life very nearly as speckled with error as Mr. Z's.

Simone used to gather her devotees about her on the floor at the shadowed end of the living-room farthest from my reading lamp. There, in the favorable obscurity, she carried on her interminable, low-voiced, one-sided chit-chat with the spirit world. "One-sided" I say, because for all Simone's loquaciousness the dead replied always with a simple "yes" or "no," and even these meager responses arrived, not as so many uttered words, but as musical tinkling sounds produced by metal striking glass. The metal was a ring which Simone wore on her finger during daytime hours, and the glass was one that usually contained iced tea when it was not filled with ghostly signals. The collision of the ring and the glass, and the resultant tinkling, was brought about by the unseen. All Simone did was to sit cross-legged with elbows resting on her knees and dangle the ring on a thread right in the middle of the red-and-white striped glass. Simone was young and healthy and her hand,

even after half the night had passed, was steady. Anyone could see that she never moved the thread. Yet the ring would sway and go plink-plunk, ting-tong against the glass, and the circle of communicants would stare in fascination at the miraculous contrivance that brought near again those who had traveled beyond the grave.

Others besides Simone might ask questions and, provided they were framed in such a way as to require no more than affirmation or negation, she would repeat them and the reply would come. All questions that threatened to overtax the limited vocabulary of the ring and glass she deflected with the statement: "He [or she] does not wish," meaning that the wraith she had at the minute on the thread was not disposed to answer. Whether it was Simone or another among the living who spoke, it was almost always in tones respectfully subdued. There was, to be sure, the scandalous exception when Tavae jumped up, called the glass a liar and stamped on it with his bare feet. But that was an isolated incident, one which made it tapu for anyone to speak to him for an entire week and which caused him to limp even longer. The general tenor of our seances was serene, the responses of the defunct unvaryingly gentle, like the polite tintinnabulation of those clustered bits of Chinese glass that used to hang in the summer breeze on verandas back home.

Until the unfortunate night when, urged by some misbegotten impulse, I sought myself to dabble with the occult, I had never taken any part. Yet though I sat removed by the length of the house from Simone and her awe-filled circle, I took pleasure in their presence. Though, with the lamp drawn low, my glance might remain on the open pages of the book before me, the murmur of their voices and the fragile bell-notes of the busy glass told me that it was necessary only to look up to dis cover the huddled shapes of my long familiar friends. I have never liked to be alone in an empty house and much prefer that there be always a number of creatures, animal and human, lying unobtrusively about. Pani-the-cairn, Beau-the-cat and assorted Tahitians were likely to be scattered here and there throughout the dwelling at any and all times, but among the rare occasions when either beasts or men could be considered unobtrusive were those when Simone presided with thread in hand. At such times all were held in a sort of rapt thralldom and a wonderful hush hovered in the house, so that the sleepy cluckings of mynas perched in the surrounding coco palms, the brief rustlings of lizards in the thatch were clearly to be heard. How I bemoan the passing of those evenings of blissful quiet, and how I reproach myself for having brought them to an end! The mere thought of such stupidity is enough to tempt me to smite my forehead Czecho-fashion and like him to cry out, "Woe is me, and thrice a fool."

On the last night Simone began operations according to cus tom by allowing the ring to hang motionless a few seconds within the glass before inquiring, "O vai tera? - who is there?" No answer being possible to the initial question, a second immediately followed.

"It is Teriitautinitehau?"

The ring swayed and produced a single light ting, indicating that it was indeed Terii. (Almost always Simone guessed right the first time, a rather remarkable feat considering the number of dead there must be of so ancient a people as the Tahitian.)

"Teriitautinitehau," Simone pursued, "you are well?"

"Ting."

"Do you wish to say ia ora na to your friends who are here in the house of Monsieur Beel?"

"Ting."

"He says 'hello,' "Simone informed her listeners who nodded and smiled sadly.

"Pauvre Terii," Teuru sighed, having forgotten or forgiven the time when, before his passing, this not-very-lovable youth slipped a live squid under her pareu. "Ask him if he is happy, Simone."

"Are you oaoa?"

"Ting."

"He is happy," Simone translated.

"Is he near to Jesus?" Angèle inquired.

Simone relayed the message and got the answer. "Yes," she said with confident calm, "he is near to Ietu."

"I should like to know about his elephantiasis," Tavae remarked.

"What do you want to know about it?" Simone demanded.

"Well, ask him if he is still obliged to carry his manhood before him on a wheelbarrow."

Simone did so.

"Ting-ting," said the glass in denial.

"What?" said Tavae. "Are there no wheelbarrows in heaven?"

"Ting-ting."

"Eahahoia!" Tavae exclaimed softly. "What do you know about that?" He looked round the circle of faces, and on each was an expression of concern similar to his own. Only Simone seemed unperturbed.

"Is it that your illness is better?" she asked of Terii.

It was.

"Is it that the Seigneur has removed your tarahua?"

Such was the case.

Simone smiled sagely. "You see, Tavae," she explained, "where Terii is, no need exists for one's manhood or for wheelbarrows."

Tavae and the others received this bit of news quietly but without noticeable enthusiasm and soon afterwards Simone dismissed the formerly afflicted youth, then fished up a second emissary from the beyond.

"Who is there? Mata?"

Sure enough, it turned out to be Mata.

More or less in spite of myself, I pricked up my ears because this was no ordinary man. I placed the book face down on my lap, regretting even as I did

so that Mata whom I had known and liked well should be now reduced to speaking in jerky, abbreviated and unsatisfying ting-tongs. He was a lusty, ribald fellow with a ready laugh and a gift of gab that made him outstanding even among a race of gabblers. Perhaps his age was fifty, or even more, when he sailed with one of the island schooners on a voyage from which none returned, yet I have never encountered a youth of twenty so filled with the sap of life. His physique was magnificent, and whenever he was not singing or telling tales or making love he was out in the bright sun fishing on the lagoons. As a consequence, his whole body (saving only the narrow strip about his powerful loins where the pareu was bound) was a handsome, glistening mahogany. To white people, whether rulers of his island or others like myself, Mata exhibited a mild tolerance but no subservience whatever. He deferred to no one, and it was this confident self-esteem that I most admired in him. He walked with head high, long arms swinging, muscular shoulders rolling - the picture of a man treading proudly upon soil he rakes to be his own. Not even when he had the misfortune to be haled into court did his manner of lordly freedom or his agile tongue desert him, and this is especially remarkable in that most Tahitians of the present day quail when confronted by an august magistrate upon his upraised bench.

Mata's performance on the occasion of his trial for incest was truly memorable.

He had many offspring throughout the islands and two of these were by his own wife. Why it should have been that of all the many fine children the two legitimate girls alone were unsatisfactory and ungrateful, no one can probably say with certainty. But their mother's disposition was less than sweet, whereas Maeva and Piu (aged fourteen and fifteen respectively) were out and out little vixens, and the day came when Mata found himself in the sweltering, crowded courtroom of the Palace of Justice while the three females explained that the father had required of them services which no daughter should give. Few of those assembled could have had any doubt of Mata's innocence even before the trial commenced, and when the fumbling, inept recital of the complainants was ended there could have been no single one. Nevertheless the presiding jurist, custom-bound, turned to Mata and asked, "Have you anything to say?"

Mata, of course, realized as well as everyone else that further words were unnecessary. But he was never a man to miss the opportunity to speak. And never before had he been afforded so large an audience as were wedged within the musty walls of the airless court. Anything to say? But certainly! He rose to his full height, flung out his long arms in a large, comprehensive gesture as if he drew to the confidence of his bosom the entire assemblage, and allowed his expressive, warmly resonant voice to roll over the room.

"My dear ones, whom have we here? Who but your old friend, that good man, Mata. And in what beautiful sheets do you find him? All the splendid morning long - a morning during which he might have drawn many a bright

red iihi or sweet and shining ava into his canoe - he has sat moistly in this unpleasant place listening to the ragging, dishonest tongues of three women. One of them is the old vahine he carried to the church. Two are the daughters she made for him, and they are young in years but old in deceit. What is one to make of such a business? While those who call me father in Tautira, in Maupiti, in Hikueru and elsewhere send me gifts of shells, fruits or pigs, these three - these three over whom the pastor has said words - present me with nothing but ingratitude and untruths. Surely it is enough to make one wonder whether women are not always best dealt with in the bush. Enfin! You have seen; you have heard. Enough said."

Enough had in fact been said and Mata might have sat down then and there and promptly gone free. But he had no intention of so soon releasing the attentive and admiring throng of his fellow countrymen. Recognizing that further plea of his own innocence would be needless, and consequently dull, he launched into the more challenging matter of establishing a defense to the indictment itself.

"Good people of Tahiti," Mata resumed, "figure to yourselves. Supposing that the halting tale you have heard were true and not false, what, even then, would it amount to? Let us pretend it is not good old Mata who stands here brushing away lies that flutter about his gray head like gnats of Nukuhiva, but some smaller and less remarkable person. There is a wife that belongs to him, and there are two daughters that he planted within her which also belong to him. Now. The daughters come to an age (as have mine) when they look to the tanes, and the tanes look as well to them. Next, imagine to yourselves that two youths come to the father and ask for the girls. Bon. Perhaps the father is a generous man and ready to give the girls away. And perhaps, also, he is fond of the young men and anxious to assure himself that what he bestows on them is good. . .."

A ripple of appreciative laughter swept the room, but Mata's handsome features remained composed and only the brightness of his dark eyes betrayed his enjoyment of the game of advocate. He raised a hand for silence and then proceeded.

"With the uru - the breadfruit - the matter is made simple. Breadfruit is like girls, otherwise so many of our daughters would not be called after that plant. Très bien. See, then, whatis done with uru. A man sows it in the ground and watches while it grows. Finally it becomes round and ripe and is ready for plucking. It is still his as it was in the beginning, his and nobody else's. It is his to place on his table, to throw away or to do with what he will. Understood. And what follows? If the sower is a man of kind heart he will take thought to his friends and, considering which are closest and dearest to him among them, will prepare to make gifts of his breadfruit. But is it a thing to be done recklessly with closed eyes?"

"Ah, no!" someone at the back shouted indignantly.

"No, no!" others agreed.

Mata nodded his approval. "Of course not. As anyone who has acquaintance with politesse knows, to give a breadfruit that is soft or immature is to give offense. The father of this breadfruit will exercise care. You, Mutoi," Mata demanded, singling out a native gendarme who stood in the doorway. "Tell me what must first be done."

Pleased to be made the focus of attention, the gendarme came forward buttoning his uniform. "With the permission of Monsieur le Juge, Mata, I will say that the owner of the uru will first crack it open and look into it before passing it to another."

"There you have it!" Mata exclaimed with a triumphant lift of his great arms. "He will first taste of the uru to make sure it is a fit present for a friend. We agreed at the outset that a young breadfruit and a young vahine are little different. So to what are we now come? Very evidently, to a truth: one is to be handled like the other!"

Mata would undoubtedly have gone on to attack the problem from still other equally novel angles had Monsieur le Juge's tolerance extended so far. But the applause, the merriment, the cries of "Bravo!" and "Bis!" and "Tapiti!" which greeted the brilliant argument were so vociferous that court was quickly adjourned. The people dispersed, and Mata was at liberty to go back to his fishing.

Returning from Mata the solid-fleshed to Mata the disembodied, it may now be understood why my interest should have been piqued when I heard that Simone professed to have him on the string. What sort of shade could so hot-blooded and jovial a man be expected to make? Surely he would bear no resemblance to the docile, namby-pamby, Simone - following creatures that she customarily produced. It was inconceivable that he should even inhabit the same insipid, missionary inspired heaven with such as those. No, one might imagine Mata luxuriating in some houri-filled Mohammedan palace of the skies, or besporting himself among the fickle, disputatious, amoral and very human gods and goddesses who populated the fabled homeland of Havaiki to which the souls of his ancestors were content to travel, but never, never could one picture him seated on a barren cloud in thumb-twiddling idleness.

So strong were my feelings in this regard that when Simone trotted out her stock question ("You are near to the little Ieru?") I waited in absurd suspense for the answer, and when the feeble ting of assent sounded, got to my feet in annoyance.

"A lying spirit has entered the glass!" I exclaimed and strode to the huddled group across the room. They stared up at me shocked and aghast, and Simone, evidently fearing that I might be so indiscreet as to stamp upon it as Tavae had once ill advisedly done, hurriedly cached the iced-tea glass under her pareu.

"Listen, my girl," I said with unnecessary heat. "Would you have us believe that is Mata?"

"It is he."

"Mata who has no more to say for himself than an idiotic 'yes-yes' or 'no-no'?"

Simone sulked. "Such is the manner of the dead."

I insinuated myself into the circle and squatted between Simone and Angèle. "It cannot be the way of Mata," I insisted. "Give me the glass. And the thread and the ring."

She drew away. "These are not affairs for a popaa," she pouted.

"Let him try. He has a kind of knowledge," Teuru said loyally. And, besides, he is become much like our people from long living among us."

"That is true," Tavae observed. "He has abilities that are unguessed. You remember how he once ,produced sudden music from a bottle? Who knows what he may bring from a painted glass?"

Reluctantly and with little grace, Simone handed me the simple apparatus. "Those who have taken flight from Tahiti return to speak to Simone only," she stated without great conviction, and then waited uneasily as I lowered the ring into the empty glass.

This I tried to do carefully so that it would hang quietly at dead center till I should be ready to begin. But due to over eagerness, or to excitement at my first direct experience with spiritualism, the hand which held the thread was far from steady and, though the trembling could hardly be detected in the faint light, the excessive liveliness of the ring was immediately remarked. To the astonishment of us all it danced, it spun and swayed and set up a merry, insistent tattoo upon the smooth walls of the glass.

"Ah," said Simone. "It does not serve you, monsieur. It speaks nonsense."

"Not at all. Did you ever know Mata to speak nonsense? Do you not hear his words pouring out? The glass cannot contain them. They overflow. They tumble over each other. They pour into our ears, filling the room, the house, the entire night."

"But one does not understand," murmured Teuru in very apparent awe.

"It is like the telegraph, child," I explained, vainly trying at the same time to slow a little the speed of sending. "The messages of the wireless are clear to those who have learned its rhythm."

"And you have learned, Monsieur Beel?" Tavae inquired in a tone of great respect.

"Indeed yes," I said, raising my voice above the wild jingling. It was, however, already obvious, to me at least, that in my agitated hands Simone's tools had gone completely berserk. A different method was required if Mata and I were to hold any intelligible intercourse.

"Take your eyes from the glass for tea," I admonished. "In it Mata makes a noise merely to show that he has come among us. And now listen, for with my lips he will speak to you." I allowed the ring to drop and cease its chatter. Several moments passed while we listened in the now silent house. Everyone in the tight little circle - Simone included - leaned forward breathlessly. Then

I opened my mouth.

"Ehoma," I said (the words coming out very satisfactorily in a voice deeper, rounder, more virile than my own). "Ehoma, o Mata-ruau teie. Eaha te huru?"

Quickly I bent to Teuru and whispered, "What does he say?"

Wide-eyed, hands clasped to her breast, she gasped, swallowed, then whispered back. "He says, 'Friends, this is good old Mata.' He asks what there is of new with us."

"How is this?" Mata continued. "Do you, Beel, not yet use the language of Tahiti?"

"In part only," I admitted, speaking normally.

Mata laughed softly somewhere far down inside me. "Taata hupehupe oe," he remarked genially. "Yes, you are still a lazy one I see. But never mind. French may serve us as well. Is there nothing to drink in the house?"

We all started slightly.

"You mean to say you still ... ?"

"I implore you, my dear, do not ask me fool questions."

"But how ... ?"

"Clearly, I shall drink from your glass."

Tavae nudged Teuru forcefully with his elbow. "Allez," he whispered hoarsely. "Vite!"

Teuru rose quickly, unsteadily to her feet, rushed into the kitchen, returned panting with the required refreshment and handed it to me.

"After you," Mata boomed. "Manuia - good luck!"

I lowered the glass a couple of inches, paused, and invited, "Now go to it, old friend."

"E pae!" Mata responded heartily. The rest of the beer disappeared very rapidly, after which we waited. It was a critical, an all-important juncture of the séance. For long seconds nothing happened. Nearly a minute must have passed and I could sense the faith of the participants ebbing on every side. A faintly ironical smile curled Simone's rather unappealing lips. She was about to speak - then, suddenly, we were electrifed. Shivers ran up our spines.

A splendid, rumbling belch of truly grand proportions had exploded in our midst.

"O-o-oh!" Teuru quavered.

"Oh," said Simone more briefly, and quite unintentionally.

"Merde!" said someone else softly, but with feeling.

"It is himself," Tavae averred in pleased amazement. "It is Mata-of-the-loud-pu, Mata who forever belched so nobly!"

"O Mata," said Angèle, also deeply moved, "it is you and no other. So be it."

"Amen," pronounced the party on her right.

"Amen," added the next and the next.

When the amens had come full circle to me I added my own, then Mata

took over.

"Little friends, dear friends," said he, "you have no idea how glad I am that you have called me up to see you."

"Up....?" Teuru queried tremulously.

"Up," Mata repeated.

"Comment alors?" Tavae asked, taken aback. "Tu niêtes pas là en haut avec le bon Dieu?"

"Obviously not," he replied calmly.

From half a dozen throats anguished wails rose to the roofing thatch and faded sadly away.

"Don't be silly," Mata added hastily. "I am where I prefer to be."

"Poor Mata!" Though the half-light in which we sat made it difficult to see, there could be no doubt that Teuru hovered on the verge of tears. "Poor, poor Mata. The door was closed to you and heaven made tapu?"

"No," Mata corrected. "I am well acquainted with that place and though it is tapu in the sense of holiness, it was not forbidden me. I entered without difficulty. My trouble was in getting out again."

The bewilderment which this speech produced in our circle was considerable. The eyes of each listener rolled till they met his neighbor's. There were stammerings and head-shakings. Angèle voiced the general perplexity.

"But *why*, Mata? Was it not nave-nave?"

"Were you not content," Simone asked in a tone tinged with reproof, "to sit at Jesus' side?"

"Like other men," Mata pointed out, "Jesus has but two sides on which to sit, and the line of people waiting to come to him would stretch from Tahiti to Rikitea. Besides - because, once arrived, one may sit forever - the line moves slowly. In any case my interest was small. No, my dears. I found it not blissful, not nave-nave, not what our pastor had led me to expect. By the way, Teuru, do you still make eyes at the pastor? And have you a new bicycle?"

Despite her consternation at Mata's revelations Teuru managed to reply truthfully, "Yes and yes."

"Good. That is as it should be. Metua is a proper man and I wish that I were in his place today where I might fondle and toy with you from time to time. But when you next amuse yourself with him, tell him that you have talked with me and that Mata advises him to speak softly when he has climbed his pulpit."

"Softly ... ?"

"Yes. Speaking so - and of Tahiti only - he will be safe from God's laughter."

Tavae was perturbed. "Is He then given to laughing at our handsome pastor?"

"Truthfully," Mata replied, "I do nor positively know. So many walk the earth who are far more ludicrous than is Metua that it may be He has hardly

noticed him."

"You were misled, Mata-of-the-loud-pu?" Tavae asked.

"Yes," Mata admitted, "innocent or not, I was. I should have been saved a long and needless journey if I had had accurate information in advance. I should then have made directly for l'enfer where the climate is much more suitable to our people than is the thin, cold air above. Forgotten Havaiki would be more to our liking, I suspect, than either of the choices that remain - but who is left to show the way to the western homeland?"

"Ai-a!" Simone exclaimed, scandalized and distressed. "Il habite avec le diable!"

"It is not so bad," Mata soothed.

"Et le paradis?"

"B'en - is not so good," he confessed.

We were stunned. Several moments passed without a word being said. Then Teuru found voice to ask incredulously, "Do you tell us, Mata, that in heaven something lacks?"

"I cannot deceive you," Mata stated with great earnestness. "In the construction of that place little thought was taken for Tahitians. For example - picture it if you can - there is no provision for pigs."

"Aita puaa?" Teuru gasped in dismay.

"No pigs," Mata repeated firmly.

"E, e, e," Teuru faltered, which is to say, tsk, tsk, tsk.

"Sans blague!" Tavae, too, could scarcely believe.

"I will have you know, Tavae," said Mata virtuously, "that I am no longer the great liar I was. There are neither small pigs nor large, neither fat nor lean, boar nor sow, and so, of course, there are none that suck the tit and no himaa in which to roast them even if there were."

"Bon Dieu! What can be done without the himaa?"

"Very little in the way of eating," Mata conceded. "And do you know, I looked everywhere without discovering a single fei, a single umara, ufi or taro? There are neither manioc with which to make poi, nor limes for steeping ia-ota, nor uru, mape or vi."

So shattering was this that our séance, no longer the subdued affair Simone had been wont to conduct, lost all semblance of order. The bodies of the appalled listeners rocked from side to side. Anguished "aue's" rent the air. The cairn scrambled to his feet, tilted back his small head and gave a sympathetic yowl. Everyone talked excitedly at once.

"Aue-te-aue," Teuru cried, "there are at least coconuts for the making of miti-hue!"

Mata was adamant. "Fermented coconut sauce is not to be had. Of what use would it be, anyway, when there is nothing worthy of being dipped within it?"

"And fafaru ... ?"

Mata shook my head. "Old fish in stagnant sea water is also unobtainable.

Bad smells, you understand, are not permitted."

Teuru, who is inordinately fond of odorous fafaru, moaned aloud. "Everything lacks," she mourned, "and nothing exists! Tell us, Mata, is there nothing at all?"

Mata was obliged to pause while I tried to think. "Well," he said finally, "there is music of a sort. But there is no thump to it, and not even Miri herself could make use of it for ori-Tahiti. I really do not know," he added, "what it is good for - except sleep, possibly."

"Ah," said Tavae without interest, "one can sleep."

"Yes," Mata agreed, "that may be done at all times and nothing will be missed."

Suddenly Teuru pulled herself together. Her face assumed a forced brightness as if she clutched a last ray of hope. "You have failed to speak of love, Mata," she said tentatively. "There must be a great deal of that. Perhaps it replaces all else?"

"Love there is in plenty," Mata let us know. "But it is of the variety that is expressed by sweet smiles and sweet words. It is a little like wind: everywhere and nowhere. It is not a solid thing that can be grasped in the hands like a woman's hips, and it produces nothing - neither babes nor sweat cries nor bruises."

Teuru wilted. So crushed was she by this final blow that she appeared to have lost the power of further speech. It was a surprise to everyone, therefore, when Tavae, who usually followed closely his sister's moods, slammed his open palm down on the matting in loud and arresting protest.

"But, Mata!" he objected angrily. "One is then less well off dead than alive!"

And Mata brought my own hand down on the mat with a wallop as impressive as Tavae's, exclaiming, "Precisely!"

Tavae's jaw dropped m consternation, as did those of the others. "Nafea?" he asked blankly, "How's that?"

"You have it exactly right," Mata assured him. "*Life* is the thing. No one has ever thought of anything better; no one ever will. And of all the places there are to enjoy it, none can compare to Tahiti."

Gradually Teuru ceased to slump. Then she smiled. She leaned forward. "Mais, c'est vrai," she said slowly, speaking in a sort of wonder. "Yes, it is true. In Tahiti there is lack of nothing. There is warmth and quick music and love and every good food including miti-hue. What more could be wished?"

"Nothing whatever," Mata admitted. "Take my advice and remain in its orders as long as you may." He cleared my throat "It is late. I must go. Would you tell me goodby?"

The "bonne nuit's," the "adieu's," the many French and Tahitian terms of endearment poured out to our departed fellow islander and they came directly from the tender hearts of those he left behind.

"Haere oe," Tavae concluded. "Go if you must, Mata-pu, and take our love

with you."

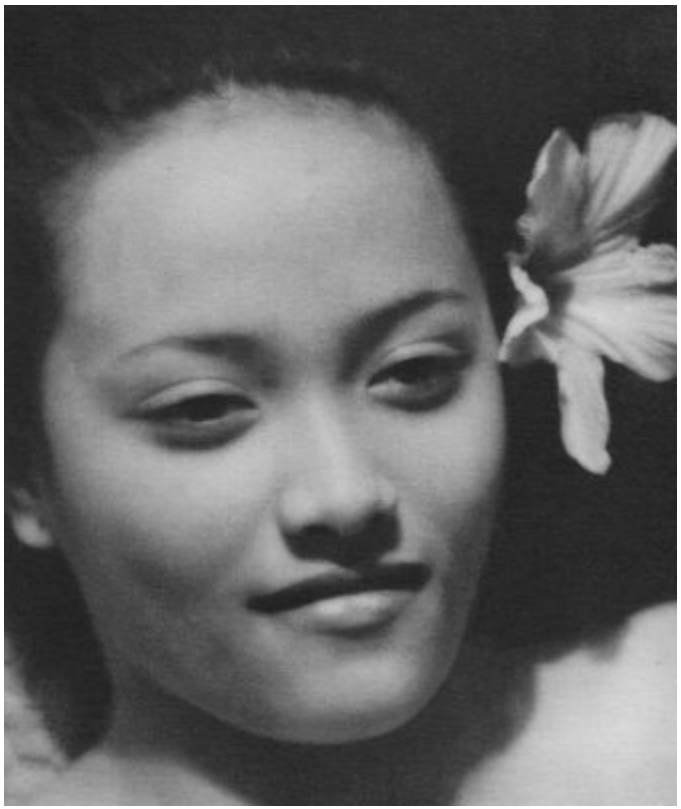
And so Mata went away.

Simone departed soon after, taking with her the ring on the thread and, as has been related, did not come back again. In a little while Teuru and Tavae and I were left alone. We were all fairly exhausted, I believe, and had not moved from our places on the floor.

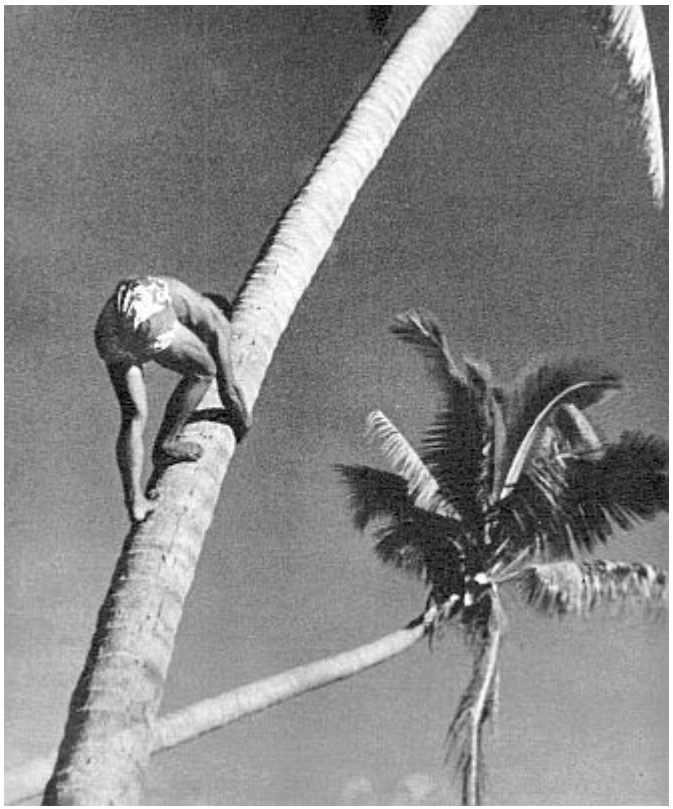
Teuru regarded me in silence for what seemed a long time before she asked thoughtfully, "Was it just a loud noise? You do not think Mata was again merely blowing his pu?"

"No,"I replied soberly. "I think that tonight he has told one truth at least: he is thoroughly right when he says that nowhere is there a land to be compared with yours. Possibly he could have added that we waste our time when we try to see beyond it. Tahiti is enough."

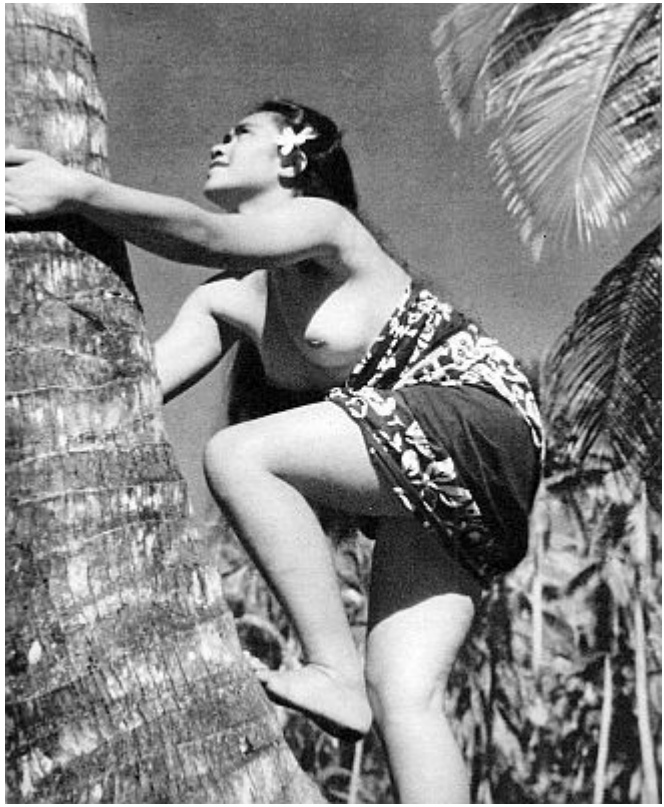
The girl nodded satisfaction. "C'est vrai," she said again softly. Then she rose. "Come, Tavae," she said, "we two will go; Monsieur Beel will stay, and we will all three look for sleep."



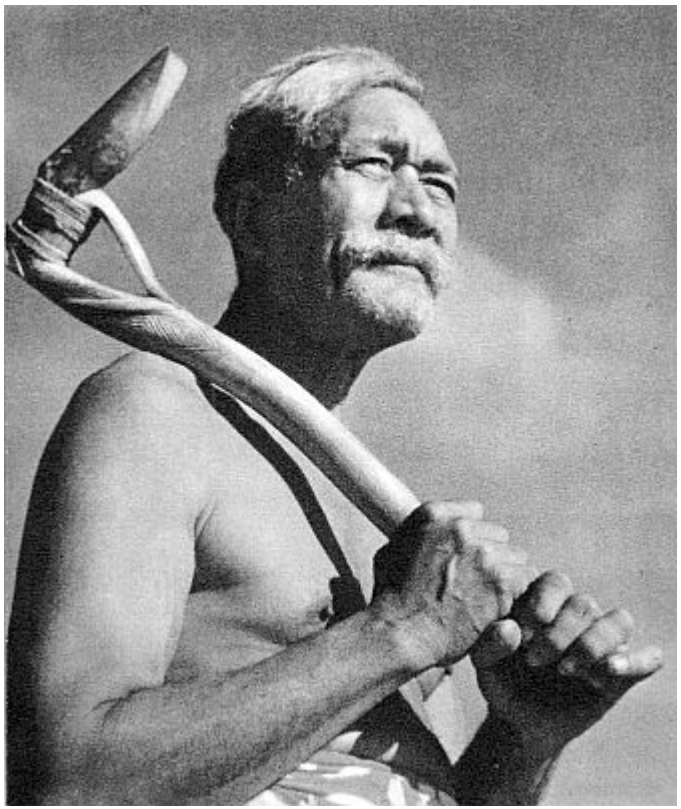
*The Chinese-Polynesian is uncommon, but far from unattractive*



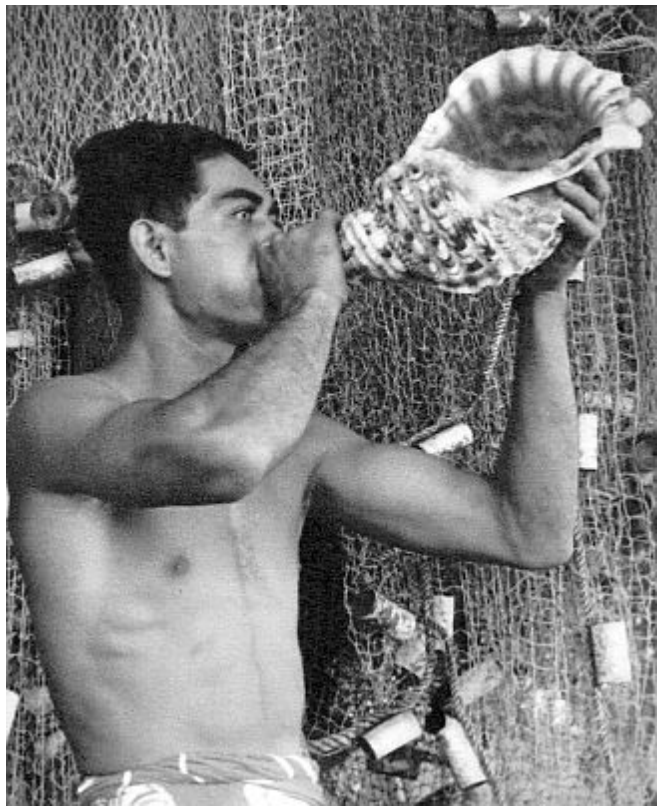
*Palms lean to the Trades.*



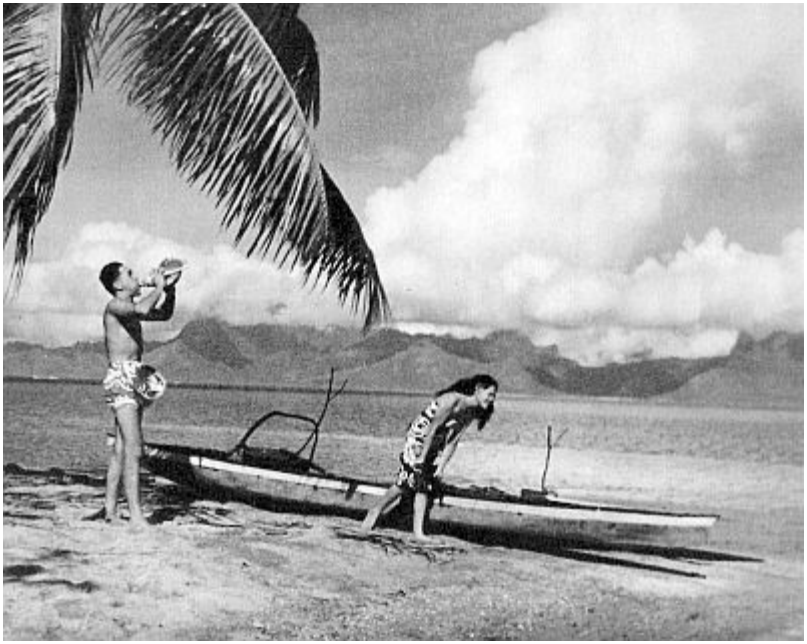
*The coconuts hang high.*



*With such an adze his ancestors built their great canoes.*



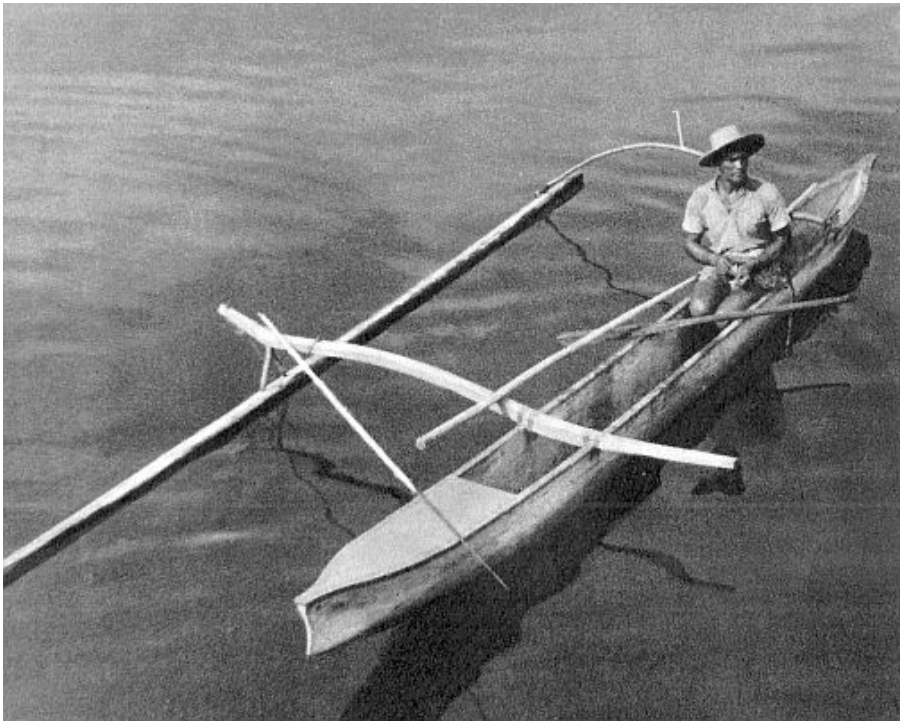
*The blast of the conch may be heard for miles*



*Across the channel lies Moorea*

*The day is rare when Moorea is not crowned with clouds.*

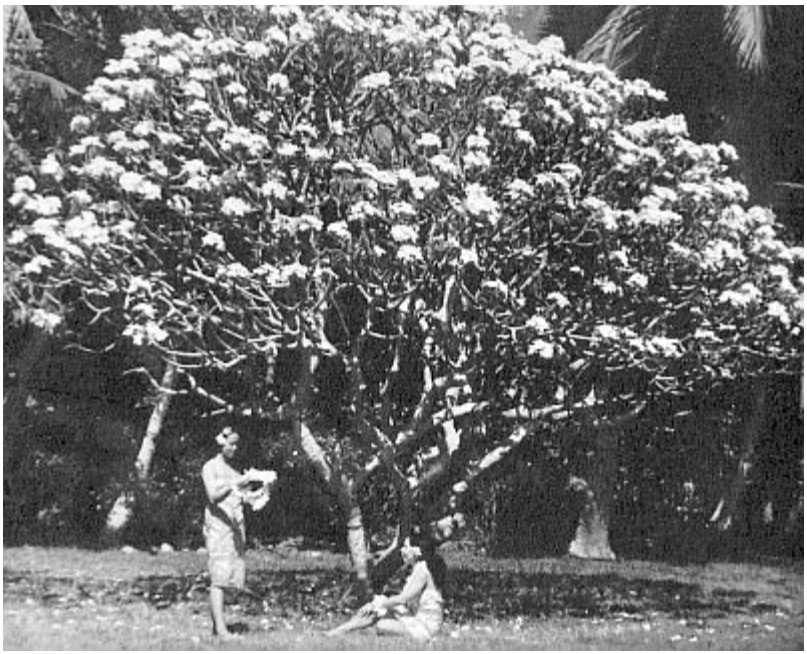
*To carry the largest nets, two canoes are bound together.*



*Few canoes are more graceful than those of Huahine.*

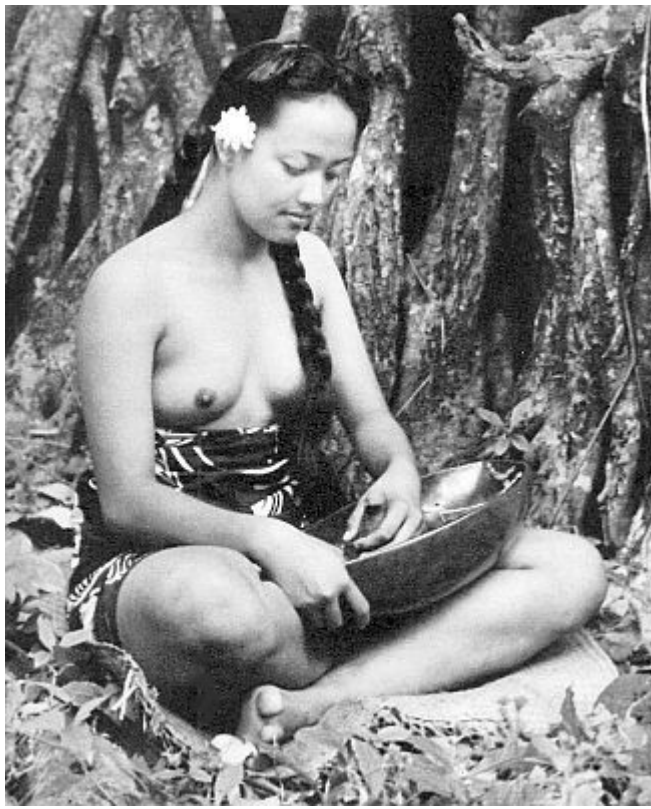
*Tapa cloth such as she makes once clothed all Tahiti.*

*Lei to Hawaiians, Tahitians call a flower garland hei.*



*Frangipani for a thousand heis.*

*Beside a fresh-water pool.*



*Beside a banyan, she crushes herbs for medicine.*

*Nimble fingers weave pandanus into mats.*

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*Grating coconut is a pleasant task.*

# PART TWO
## By the Sea of the Moon

## XIII. *Concerning Cowboys and a Temperamental Schooner*

IT MAY SEEM STRANGE that after throwing out the suggestion that Tahiti is the acme of everything desirable in this world or the next I should, in these pages, immediately take leave of it and make for another island. For so doing I have no excuse except the rather feeble one that a book can hardly hope to be more consistent, circumspect or rigidly ordered than its subject matter. This one is about Polynesians. In their own words, then, tirara parau - enough said.

We are going to the island where Teuru and Tavae were born, to the island Huahine which rides nearly in the center of a sea that holds the moon. There are barely a hundred miles to cover, yet they take one far from foreign tongues and foreign faces and far, too, from modern times.

Of all the many occasions when I have sailed across the Sea-of-the-Moon to put foot on Huahine (and so step back down the centuries) the first, of course, remains most vivid, and it is that to which I turn.

All that appeared to me necessary for the voyage was neatly stowed in a small zipper bag - shirts, shorts, toilet articles, a couple of books, tobacco - and I smoked a pipe while waiting for Teuru and Tavae to come with the camionette. The ship, I'd understood, was to sail at five, but it was some while after when a wretched grinding and panting told me some sort of machine was approaching. Looking out, I saw a model-T truck careening wildly between the boles of the coconuts. Tavae must have called at a bar during the afternoon; he was seated astride the hood and was foolishly waving his arms while he shouted something in which the word caupoi was now and again to

be distinguished. Every native has a deep-seated desire to be a cowboy, and now he was evidently at it. Whoever drove the truck was also in the spirit of the thing. The rattling vehicle abruptly left the trail and made a detour for the clothesline, on which hung pajamas, duck trousers and other items which Teuru doubtless meant to take care of when we returned from overseas. As they passed, Tavae expertly lassoed the week's wash and drew up under my stern gaze dragging the mess behind. The truck was crammed with bulging, pareu-wrapped bundles and cheap wooden chests. There were also bunches of bananas, taro roots, fei, strings of oranges, limes, mape-nuts, two small pigs and a crate of squawking chickens - all of which were to be found in such abundance at Huahine that they comprised principal exports. But that, needless to say, was not the point. One must not arrive empty handed, and it was clear that we should suffer no such embarrassment.

In order to facilitate transport, Teuru had crammed three hats on her head; the fine pandanus Sunday one, the coarsely plaited blue-and-white for ordinary occasions, and the decaying thing of brown niau which she wore fishing on the lagoon. She looked out from under the brims of this tiered structure and laughed. So did Tavae and so did the chauffeur, a lumpish individual whom I now recognized as Svengali. (The latter, was nearly toothless and must have had a decent Tahitian name but I never heard it used.)

We were late, so I innocently imagined, and my expression was consequently severe. "That was a crazy thing to do," I said, eyeing the badly mauled wash.

Svengali showed his front tooth in a huge grin. "A true word, Beel. And very big fun."

Tavae had slipped off his perch and Teuru wriggled out from the confusion of baggage. Together they began to gather up the laundry.

"It was a big damn foolishness," I persisted. Heaven knows why I couldn't simply laugh like the rest of them. Popaas are always being wet blankets; they think such things as travel and catching boats are serious matters. Today I know they aren't, but at the time I was still comparatively new in the islands and had an appalling number of senseless notions to unlearn. So I continued to mumble and grumble and at last tossed my bag on top of the heap, then squeezed into the front seat between the driver and Tavae. Teuru climbed on the running board, holding on to the hats with one hand, and we started off.

But the smiles were now gone from all three brown faces. There were no more caupoi whoops and we jounced along in a constrained silence. We passed the tin-roofed schoolhouse on its high, spindly stilts where fifty small voices were repeating in unison some nonsense about Paris being on the river Seine; we passed Atua's shack where, as usual, the single bulb burned weakly in the sunlight on the outside wall, announcing that he had both electricity and a fine contempt for money, then swung onto the highway at Chinese Ah You's 'store and 'threaded our way through a flock of ill-tempered geese. From there, the road to Papeete was clear. Svengali gave her the gun and we roared on

down the pleasant green countryside with a pretty plume of steam swirling from the radiator.

A white man, unlike a Tahitian who will, as may have been gathered, jump from tears to laughter all in a minute, requires time to come out of an unfortunate humor. My companions were aware of this and waited patiently. They were obliged to wait till we had gained the bridge which crosses the cool, hurrying Fataua River, at which point I perceived that Tavae held a bottle of red wine clamped between his knees. He was obviously dying to tip it up but restraining himself in the belief that the time for gaiety was not yet. Vin ordinaire is said to be good for the stomach before a sea voyage.

"How about a drink, Tavae?"

They exchanged glances, their eyebrows raised, they smiled. The clouds were gone and the sun burst out again. "Manuia!" Tavae exclaimed, which is to say here's how, and he extended the bottle.

We all took a pull, all except Teuru who had no hands to spare, and by the time the truck sailed past the town cathedral were utterly carefree. A glance at the clock in the bell tower showed that it was five-thirty, but even this no longer seemed significant, and that in fact it was not was clear from the moment we came in sight of the wharf. There was no visible sign of an imminent departure.

No tramp steamer was in port to dwarf her by comparison and the spars of the schooner *Poti Raiatea* rose proudly tall beside the quay. They towered above the long line of copra sheds, above the yacht club and the congenial drinking place named for navigating Bougainville. The stout masts which once grew from cold Canadian soil overlooked a crowd heterogeneous as might be found in Saigon or Singapore. Pressing close about her rail were Frenchmen from Bordeaux, Hindus from Calcutta, Chinese from Canton, London Englishmen and Yanks from down in Maine. But though such were sprinkled through the throng they were near lost among the faces of even brown, of warm, full lips, dark eyes and darker hair the Polynesian faces of Tahiti, Bora Bora, Rapa or Nukuhiva there assembled. These are the ones for whom *Poti Raiatea* beats back and forth and up and down the wind, the ones who con and man her, whose hands built her rib on rib. It is their language which the old ship heeds - a language liquid soft, musical as the trades which brush her shrouds. The seas she voyages are far from the land where the word is heard, but the spirit of manana is confined to no single country, and hovers as dreamily somnolent over *Poti* on all her travels as it does about any sun-baked adobe. Even a foreigner is soon cloaked with the same indifference. Do we raise Huahine in the morning - afternoon? Perhaps another day. Quien sabe? Who knows or cares? (But in the island world we say, "Aita peapea" - no bother.) And no bother it certainly is for the human freight, though to the fowls crammed in their little bamboo cages, and to the cattle with heads lashed against the bulwarks, the time may pass more slowly and with less of entertainment.

The sun was still above the jagged mountains of off-lying Moorea when Svengali swung us, at most reckless pace, onto the cluttered dock. Leaving Tavae and Teuru to wrestle with their conglomerate baggage, I began to make my way through the crowd of those come to take leave of relatives and friends bound to other lands and had progressed very nearly as far as the vessel's rail when a voice said in quiet French, "Where do you go, monsieur?" and I turned to find that it was Tau.

We had met, Tau and I, perhaps twice before. But each encounter had been at a waterfront tavern where friendships ripen quickly and there was little of his history which I had not learned over the rum punch. I knew his age, which was forty nine; I knew his lineage - at least as well as he did himself - and it was half Tahitian, half Spanish or French (the reason for slight uncertainty on the latter point arising from the fact that naval vessels of the two nations came simultaneously to anchor in Papeete harbor at the time of his conception). I knew also that Tau had been *Poti's* quartermaster since she first tasted of salt water. It was good to see him.

We are going with you," I explained. "We are going to Huahine."

"That is very well," he said with his pleasant smile, "Mais allez doucement."

"Softly? Why should I go softly?"I extended the watch on my wrist. "See - it is far past the hour."

"Yes, yes," he replied tolerantly, "it is a good hour. A good hour for a drink. Shall we not go and find one?"

"But look, Tau," I said earnestly, "everyone is aboard."

He gave a casual glance to the raised quarterdeck, which was jammed to the taffrail with people. There were dusky women clad in pareus of bright yellow and red and blue; there were men with broad-brimmed, flower-decorated hats fine-woven from pandanus leaves; there were infants and children beyond number. "No, no," he told me calmly, "there are many more to come. And there is much more of cargo."

"More cargo!" I exclaimed aghast. "Where, Tau, do you think to carry more?"

Already *Poti* rode deep in the tranquil green water at the wharf-side. If such a thing as a Plimsoll line existed in Polynesia it would have long passed from sight. In the waist, sacks of cement, of flour, of rice and brown sugar from the island's own plantations rose up higher than the box-like galley which hugged the foremast. And yet, from a jumbled mound upon the wharf, still other merchandise was being wrenched and heaved over the side. Onto the top-heavy deck above the poop, into the outboard-slung lifeboats, up into the very eyes of the ship, brown hands continued to toss bundles of empty copra sacks, cases of tinned salmon, beef and butter, bicycles, wall clocks, guitars, rocking chairs and bedsteads, lanterns and fishing spears, bunches of leaden taro, breadfruit and drinking nuts, crates of ducks and hens . . . when I saw the hulls of two long outrigger canoes being precariously balanced on the

roof over the passengers' heads I turned my eyes away.

"I could use a drink, Tau," I admitted. "Let us go."

I can no longer count the number of voyages I have made with the *Poti Raiatea* to the home which I later built upon the island called Huahine. But, although one comes eventually to accept the vessel most casually and to forget that all other craft which sail the seas are not made in the same mold, the feeling with which one goes each time to meet her does not change. It always seems that the trusty schooner will never sail on the day affixed and often it is truth. There are a great many provisos and whether the night is to be spent on the wide Pacific or upon dry land depends upon matters most diverse. Frequently a man must feel that his fate and destiny hinge upon concerns absurdly small and far beyond his own control. Yet never, I suspect, is awareness of the humbling fact complete as when he stands waiting upon the veteran island trader. Yes, it all depends, and Tau explained it very well when we had seated ourselves at a small table on the second floor veranda of the yacht club.

"Par exemple, there is Mama Tu. You do not think we could leave without her?"

Of course I knew better than that. Everyone loves Mama Tu most dearly and I understood how impossible was the thought that she be left behind. But impossible, too, it seemed to me as I glanced down at the jutting posteriors which lined *Poti's* stern, was the idea that she should find place for such hips as hers anywhere aboard.

Bartender Jules placed before us the frosted glasses of rum in which half limes floated, and Tau continued. "Mama came from Huahine on our last voyage and has gone to Tautira to visit her son. You have been there, no?"

I shook my head.

"Well, it is many miles away on Tahiti's other border. If she left in the early morning she might be here sometime soon. But who knows? Perhaps the farewells of her grandchildren have detained her, or the conversation of a friend met along the way; possibly the cart by which she comes has cast a wheel." He paused and his eyes, wandering over the harbor below, came to rest on the little palm-fringed islet of Motu Uta, which lies cupped very nearly in the center. "It may also be," he said, lifting his punch, "that Mama has confused the days and still dozes beneath the son's thatch roof."

No one will deny that in a land where one day is much like another it is easy to lose track, and I was ready to appreciate and to excuse if Mama Tu had in this way erred. Nevertheless, Tau's next remark took me slightly aback.

"There is a further possibility," he sagely stated, "we may *all* be here upon the wrong day. I think Captain Hema said Thursday and not Saturday, but there is the chance that I am mistaken because Mahana Maha and Mahana Maa are easily mixed."

"But," I asked, "doesn't the captain live here in town?"

He waved an arm. "The house is yonder, two blocks from the market

place."

"Then you have only to go and ask what he intends."

Tau crossed his legs comfortably and moved his wide bare toes. "Mais oui. But for what reason? By remaining here I shall learn quite as much. If he does not come I shall know that it was Mahana Maa."

Jules had returned and gone again before I took courage to ask, "Are there other things which stand between us and Huahine?"

"No-o," the helmsman replied slowly, "if, when Pierrot speaks to it, the diesel commences; if the stevedores have got everything stowed before dark; if there is no turning from drink in the heads of the crew . . ."

I held up a hand. "Thanks, Tau, that will do; I see how it is." The thought came to mind that it might be as well to abandon all idea of travel, collect Tavae and Teuru, and go on back to the country. I had, in fact, gone so far as to drop several five franc notes on the table top and was on the point of rising when there came a sound of great commotion from the decks of the *Poti Raiatea*. Both of us leaned over the balcony railing.

From the massed pigs, cattle and sheep there had for long come a mingled squealing, bleating and lowing, and even as we looked a yearling which was being swung over the side in an improvised sling wriggled free of the confining harness and dropped, loudly bawling, into the starboard scuppers. (I may say, parenthetically, that I have never discovered the meaning of the continual exchange of livestock between Tahiti and the Leeward Islands. Whether the schooners are out or homeward bound, the foredeck is equally congested with the sea sick critters, and I am sure there are others besides myself who have wished some regulation forbade their transport except upon such voyages as are made down wind.) But the outcry which had drawn our attention came from the human passengers, and it rose even higher than that set up by the distressed beasts.

From stem to stern of the ship was agitated movement Brown arms waved and gesticulated, brown lips parted in happy smiles. "Mama Tu!" they called in joyous excitement, "Mama Tu!"

The crowd about the vessel parted to make way for an ancient surrey which advanced uncertainly amidst a merry shower of tossed flowers. Urged on by two highly elated boys who perched in front, a very small and bony horse dragged the incredible vehicle forward. Each of the four wheels seemed bent on taking a different course yet, mysteriously, the equipage made a fairly straight descent for *Poti's* side, there to come to a creaking halt. Mama Tu occupied the back seat in its entirety. From under the broad stiff brim of her black lacquered pandanus hat she beamed delightedly to right and left, then, grasping one of the metal supports which held up the top with its decaying bits of fringe, heaved her mother-hubbard clad bulk aloft and put foot upon the carriage step. Immediately the surrey assumed an alarming list to port and the little horse staggered in the shafts.

"A mai na, Mama Tu - come, come!" cried the ecstatic passengers, and to

the accompaniment of a guitar which began to twang somewhere aboard, they burst into a song of welcome for their beloved friend.

Mama Tu released the conveyance which had miraculously carried her all the way from distant Tautira and, leaving it wildly rocking behind her, she made for the schooner's rail.

It was then I saw that Tau had pushed back his chair. "Allons!" he said, "Let's go."

"Go?" I replied, still entranced by the scene below. "Go where"

"To Huahine."

At that he had my attention. "Vraiment?"

"But certainly. There is the captain now."

I followed his outstretched arm. Captain Hema was to be seen striding purposefully down the wharf, his blue-and-white striped pajama top billowing in the wind and exposing the dark expanse of his naked chest, the yellow chauffeur's cap riding the back of his bald head. The many "ifs" with which we had been hemmed in had apparently all at once resolved themselves.

We were sailing!

## XIV. *To Leeward with the Poti Raiatea*

AFTER WARNING ME that there was still no hurry, Tau left me beside Teuru, whom we had discovered among the crowd, and then went to take his post aboard. Captain Hema had gained the galley roof, and as I watched he grasped a cord which stretched to the whistle on the mast and gave it a vigorous yank. Nothing happened. Angrily he spun about and raising hands to his mouth shouted down an open hatch, "Wind! Where's the wind?"

A placid face appeared from below, a round oil-smeared face of which I was later to become most fond. "The wind, Cap'n, is in your big opu," said Pierrot calmly, "and if you want to blow your whistle before I get the compressor going I will tell you how to do it." The engineer explained how while the crowd, their own gabble momentarily stilled, gave appreciative attention. When Pierrot had done there was a roar of good-natured laughter and the casual business of loading went on again.

Some while later, however, there was wind and the captain produced three shrill toots from the whistle. "Voilà!" I said to Teuru, impressed by the imperative sound of the signal, "come along."

She was holding one of the little pigs intended as a gift to someone across the water, and gently scratched its belly to keep it quiet. "No, it is nothing," she replied amiably.

I was about to expostulate, and then forgot it. There have been men aplenty who have found Teuru a remarkable type of native beauty. Artists and sculptors are always trying to get her to model. Itinerant playboys are always after her to make love. And though money cannot lure her to either of these pursuits, rum punch or a fine physique often will. As she stood there fooling with the pig she was, whether looked at from the artist's point of view, or otherwise, adorable. A piece of cloth with brilliant fishes on it was bound over her breasts and the blue pareu was tied round her middle. The hats had some where been dispensed with and the jet cloud of hair hung softly, waist-long against her shapely back. She was contemplating the blissful animal in her

arms with an expression at once pensive and wistful. What mystery there is in this ancient people sprung from an unknown natal land, and who shall see behind the even, finely carved features so beautiful in repose to delve the racial mind? I had a notion to do so myself.

"What are you thinking?" I demanded suddenly of the lovely creature.

Her large eyes looked up from under their heavily languorous lashes. "I was thinking," she said, "how I am going to be sick all over."

Finally there began a general movement toward the *Poti Raiatea* as though some instinctive sense had succeeded, where Hema's whistling had failed, in convincing the people that the schooner would indeed soon sever its connection with Tahiti. They clambered aboard wherever foothold offered and we were swept along. Because of the sudden mass scaling of her sides *Poti* assumed an increasingly heavy list, and I found myself obliged to take to hands and knees to clear the poultry laden lifeboat which overhung the dock, momentarily threatening to cut off the uncertain approach altogether. My concern must have been shared by the feathered passengers overhead, because they set up so ungodly an outcry that, in utter confusion, I missed the goal for which I had started and arrived over the rail into the cattle pens. Captain Hema himself came to lead me back to that part of the ship occupied by the two legged voyagers, but most of these also, I observed, were moving about on all fours as they disposed themselves on mats, bundles and pillows, and it was necessary to pick one's way with caution. We brought up at last by the engine-room hatch just forward of Tau and the helm.

Rotund, nut-brown Hema knew some English. "You the fellow's goin' to sleep with the countess?" he asked brightly.

"Not that I'm aware of," I replied quickly. "Who is the countess?"

The captain had no time for explanations, but indicated the two narrow bunks stretched fore and aft above the engine hatch, their separate mattresses divided by an inch-wide crack between. "Better grab the starboard side before she comes aboard, 'less you like diesel fumes," he advised. "That's wind ward."

I took the tip and slid promptly on to the berth, from which vantage point I watched the shore lines cast off. There was a great hissing and clanking below as Pierrot got his motor turning and then, above the metallic uproar, a shrill imperious cry rang out from shore. "Attendez, attendez!"

A tall, aggressive woman with straw-colored hair drawn tightly back from a brightly painted face was shouldering her way through the massed crowd on the pier. Her long bare legs, protruding from the briefest of shorts and ending in high heeled Parisian shoes, bore down on us with long strides. She would have been arresting under any circumstances, and the certain knowledge that I was staring at my bunk-mate would have assured my undivided attention, if it had not been for the even more remarkable thing which loped along beside her. It was a Great Dane of simply unbelievable size. Together with its mistress, it got on amidships.

Pierrot threw in his clutch, Tau - now naked to the waist spun the wheel, and *Poti Raiatea* swung in a graceful arc from its mooring. She came about till her bows pointed for the dull red sun, which was by this time lying upon the western rim of the sea. A gentle swell coming through the Papeete pass lifted her upon its back: *Poti* had come to life, she was free at last!

But no, hold on....there seemed to be a hitch. From almost under my nose a large woman struggled to her feet. Clustered about her was a brood of smallish children, some of them eating bananas or pineapple slices and one, at least, asleep on its stomach with small bare posterior upraised. These she tossed about this way and that, looking under each one for something which was evidently misplaced. Then she straightened. She raised her arms on high and let out shriek after shriek. "Aue! Aue! The little one, the little one is not!"

Everyone began to look. Under boxes and bales and tins, in the hold and galley. Still the little one was not. Suddenly a keen-eyed individual pointed back to the berth from which we had just successfully cleared. Yes, it was there. Even I could see it - an insignificant two-year-old size, pink-wrapped bundle sitting disconsolately and alone atop a pile of copra sacks. We went back. Captain Hema jumped ashore, snatched up the babe and returned it to the maternal arms.

"My god, woman," he said wearily, "why you want to make so many you lose them all over the place?"

We then made for the open sea. A few points to port, purple shadows cast by Moorea's shattered peaks rushed out to meet us. Astern dusk gathered in Tahiti's palm groves and valleys and lower slopes. Though it was hidden from us on our lowly, ocean-hugging craft the sun still blazed against the highest wooded mountains where fabled elves are said to play, and dead ahead grotesque, flaming cloud-shapes illumined all the vast horizon. In space we were midway of the two fair islands, at a distance from each such that all sign of men and of their habitations was lost, merged with the dimming masses of the land. In time we had reached the hushed, briefly suspended moment between tropic day and night, the moment when Polynesian gods pause to rest before raising up the soft, enveloping dark. *Poti Raiatea* was, for that instant, an enchanted ship upon a magic sea; she was the center of the living universe as, like Bible Ark, she floated on the boundless ocean. Noah himself could have carried breathing cargo little more diverse than was our own. We were Tahitian, French and Oriental, Hindu, Fijian and Malay; we carried beasts and birds, and much of the insect world. Perhaps I exaggerate, but I imagine a quiet to have descended upon the schooner in that breach held interval when the wheels of heaven ceased to turn: the countless infants stopped their puling, the cattle their lowing, the pigs their squealing. For a full minute not a single copra bug walked upon my face. It was one of those odd and rare moments in which one experiences a sense of unreality, of being somehow disembodied and on the verge of great discovery. One's soul expands, is lifted, reaches out to push aside the veils which hide life's somber riddle. I must have lapsed into

some such reverie when a warm spray of beer from the bottle which Tavae was opening at my elbow brought me out of it and, looking up, I saw that the stars were shining, the mast swaying back and forth between them.

"When the head turns like a windmill," said Tavae, offering the bottle, "the ship is of no matter."

I waved him away - a mistake, as it developed, for even the mild fortification of warm beer can ease many a situation, and he had no sooner disappeared into the gathering night forward than I observed that one had arisen. The countess was laying herself out on our bunk. It seemed to me, furthermore, that either carelessly or deliberately she had disposed herself in such manner as to overhang, protrude, and encroach upon that portion of the communal bed which was clearly mine by reason of the forty francs I had paid for it. The gentlemanly thing, obviously, would have been for me to clear out and turn in on the hard deck. There was not space remaining upon the deck, however, as the faint reflected light from the binnacle showed, to accommodate a middling big pumpkin and, anyway, I have never learned to fold up in anything like that size. But all such considerations aside, there are rimes for the gentler instincts and there are times for standing, or lying, firm and hanging on to one's own. During the early morning hours I had industriously planted seeds in boxes under the eaves of the Pirae home; for two hours I had thrashed about in the cool waters of the lagoon; most of the afternoon, before the arrival of the truck and cowboys, I had spent at the typewriter. I wanted sleep and threw myself down to get it. It was then I discovered that the underpinning of the so-called double bunk consisted of a loosely drawn network of coconut fiber cords which sagged hammock-like in the middle the minute weight was applied to it. While I still clung to the edge thinking this over, the countess, suddenly restless, rose, walked aft, and disappeared behind the door-flap of a curious little structure, new to me at the time, but with which I later became intimate.

The *Poti's* outboard john is of shape roughly similar to those encountered on dry land but, while thoroughly practical, was never intended for tranquil or lengthy rumination. It floats over and beyond the stern on slender braces which look entirely inadequate to support the flimsy affair of wood and canvas, let alone a tenant of any substance. Even amidships the schooner has a lively motion; from this high after-post the sensation is unlike anything I have ever experienced except, perhaps, the roller coasters at Revere Beach. More trying still is the haunting thought of possible disaster which hovers like a gloomy albatross over the *fare iti* or little-house. One is attacked by visions of parting bolts and outriggers, of dropping unmissed, unmourned, behind. It is a harrowing idea, that of being deposited alone in the midst of the majestic ocean in so unseaworthy a craft, with not so much as a mail order catalogue to distract from a hopeless plight. Harrowing, yet unavoidable; for the moment the sail cloth is lowered there comes the conviction that all connection with the bucking ship is severed and it becomes necessary to glance down through

the slatted floor to make sure that the ride is still above the waves and not upon them. But such procedure has also its alarming aspects and discloses, as *Poti* dips her bows into the trough, a churning wake dropping dizzily from sight. The *fare iti* takes angel wings and soars for heaven then, in reversal so sudden that one is airily lifted from all contact with reality, plunges madly back for Davy Jones. I hasten to admit, however, that not all visitors to this animated outhouse are prey to emotions or thoughts like my own: usually it is filled with hearty singing. And yet, during the period of the countess's occupancy, it remained circumspectly silent.

Captain Hema, who had discarded his pajama coat in favor of shorts alone, passed just then and I stopped him. "Who is she?" I whispered.

"Who is who?"

"The countess."

"Oh." He scratched his chest and chuckled. "I dunno; everybody calls her that out here. She's the mistress of some bloke in Raiatea - but that don't need to bother you none."

I was still clinging doggedly to the edge of the bunk, carefully weighing these words, when the lady returned and climbed in.

Viens, mon chéri," she murmured. "Viens à côté de maman."

If this speech puzzled me it was simply that in poking into many corners of the world, some of them very strange ones, I had come to the conclusion that everywhere a certain amount of preliminary verbal groundwork was laid. Into what silly errors one falls if he tries to formulate such sweeping generalities. The thing to do, of course, is to keep an open mind.

"What have you got, my love?" the dulcet voice persisted. "Que tu es bête!"

Presumably no one enjoys being called stupid, particularly if he has a lurking suspicion that he is being so. The feeble light which escaped from about the compass may have been partly responsible, but the few glances I had stolen at close range seemed to show that the countess had her points.

"Viens, mon petit chou," she implored in utterly siren tones.

I have intimated that gentlemanly behavior is sometimes out of place, but acting the complete boor is another matter. And there is something about being called a little cabbage that is difficult to resist. . . .

Apparently the Great Dane, to whom I belatedly realized these remarks to have been addressed, had a similar feeling for cabbages. He succumbed to the final blandishment and, leaping up, spread his huge carcass between us. This was subject for much interested comment among the nearer passengers, and deservingly, for it was a feat comparable to getting a calf into bed. It was also the signal for me to arise and spend the rest of the night at the helm beside Tau who, so I was pleased to discover, had good, strong opinions of the strange sleeping habits of popaa women.

## XV. *Tero!*

THE GREAT CAPTAIN COOK was the first white man to look upon Huahine, which some hold, and I among them, the most beautiful bit of land which ever the gods designed. It is hard to imagine what may have been the emotions of the eighteenth century mariners out of Hogarth's unlovely England when they beheld the curving shores. If they did not think it heaven itself, I miss my guess. And miss it I probably do, if one is to judge by the men's behavior as soon as they were loose among the palms and the vahines. Nonetheless, at the moment of discovery, even those to whom a shore leave had never had other meaning than the nearest gin shop and the London bawds must have had some inkling in their heads that here was an unsullied jewel, a truly fairy isle, fresh and washed and green as if it had but that minute lifted from the clear blue seas.

"Our bread," Cook wrote before the landfall, "was so full of vermin that, notwithstanding all possible care, we had sometimes twenty of them in our mouths at one time, every one of which tasted hot as mustard." So the fruits of the island doubtless looked as good as the women. Of the latter the captain made this interesting observation: "There is a dance which is performed by young girls, consisting of motions and gestures beyond imagination wanton, in the practice of which they are brought up from their earliest childhood, accompanied by words which, if it were possible, would more explicitly convey the same ideas. But the practice which is allowed to the virgin is prohibited to the woman from the moment that she has put these hopeful lessons in practice and realized the symbols of the dance."

Yes, it was quite a place to come to. And so it is today. The restrictions, the tapus, are now off so that a grandmother may dance if she chooses - a performance which is not so dull, either. This is not so remarkable as it might at first sound if one stops to consider that we speak of a country in which a woman may be, and often is, a grandmother at thirty. But even genuinely old dames, not content to sit tamely by watching the young, frequently leap nimbly into the ori-Tahiti and their ancient rears are little less eloquent than

the firmer-butted youth. The native dance is hard work, yet I have rarely seen it done with more fire and reckless abandon than by a crone who haunts the waterfront cabarets of Papeete. No one knows her name; she is simply, "La Folle"the crazy one. Night after night she can be seen in that civilization-tainted town where sailors, half-castes and assorted scum dance breast to breast in fashion similar to any United States honky-tonk. La Folle is never quiet while the music lasts. Contemptuously solo, she whirls among the unheeding rest, arms uplifted, well-padded hips as vigorously a-tremble as when she faced her first tane fifty years ago. Her lips part in a sly smile which disloses toothless gums and I have often wondered what may be its meaning, what goes on within her gray, flower-wreathed head. Very possibly the answer is nothing. The hula stems, not from the cerebrum, but the seat.

When Cook's stout ship *Endeavor* moored to a coconut palm in one of Huahine's mountain-rimmed bays, a lively trade, much of it barter of nails for the favors of local belles; began and went on till the carpenter discovered he had but a handful of spikes remaining. Too late, an effort then appears to have been made to retrieve some of the so necessary hardware. The natives, however, had already planted the greater part of their booty in expectation of later rich harvest.

Between four and five of the morning *Poti Raiatea* was following the dim trail blazed by the *Endeavor*, standing in for the same narrow pass, going to her meeting with the descendants of the hopeful sowers of nails. Thanks to the countess and her bedfellow, I was on deck to see Huahine grow out of the South Sea dawn. Legend has it that heroic Maui first grappled with the islands on the ocean floor and raised them frothing, thundering, into the light of day. But though Maui is gone and near forgotten, the pageant which he initiated continues. On this morning we came upon Huahine while the dull black of the salt deep still shrouded her. Unexciting they seemed at first - barren-smooth, mono-toned hummocks, drear as winter hills in a northern dusk. But then one saw them stir; they came alive and moved and changed! Steadily as the schooner approached over long, unruffled swells, the tops of still largely hidden mountains strained up ward. The pinnacles lengthened and drew after them the loftiest sheer-sided slopes; the steeply slanting plateaus, too, forged skyward and dragged behind them cloud-wet ravines where springs and rivers have their birth. Valleys appeared and widened toward the sea. Last of all to reach the world of light and sound were narrow coastal strips of plain, and booming white clothed reefs. There it stood, complete: the South Sea island of which men by the thousands had dreamed since the discoverers returned to speak of it, and yet, strangely, an island less well known today than almost any other. Huahine, cleft in two by a shallow channel, beaded with inland bays - Huahine, where ghosts still wander over and beneath the green lagoons and through the tall grasses on lonely mountainsides, where old idols, fallen and half obliterated by jungle vine, still sway the people's lives, and human speech is that of Polynesia a thousand years ago. Witch the unsubstantial,

luring, unreasonable beauty of which a mirage is made it floated, gray in a lightening sky, small segments of near-transparent cloud clinging to the cool heights like spindrift born upward from the mothering sea, the slender-stemmed palms at its base leaning outward to the waking trade.

Evidently Teuru's fears of seasickness were unfounded, for a movement at my side caused me to turn and discover her, clear-eyed and refreshed, after a night curled up on the hard deck. From its wrapping of leaves she removed a brilliant purple blossom and carefully placed it in her hair.

"Why did you not say that Huahine is beautiful?" I reproached her. "We should have come before."

"But of course it is," she replied, still occupied with the flower. "Everyone knows it to hold the largest, fattest crabs of any island."

"Crabs! Mon Dieu, Is that all you can think of when you return to the enchanted place where you were born?"

She turned her face up and smiled. "No," she said, "now I think of how my mother gave me birth. I was, you know, the child of her old age. Shall I tell?"

"Yes" I said. "Tell."

"Like this it happened. Mama Ruau - that is our word for 'grandmother,' but also for any mother who is old and dear - Mama Ruau went to fish for paaihere. She took her canoe and her paddle and hook and line and some minnows for bait. She left our village and paddled to the beach of the orange groves and ran the canoe upon a coral-head a little way from shore. There she dropped her line and caught first a small paaihere and then another one, small also. She baited the hook once more and had tossed it in when the pains began. She stopped to consider. 'An hour will pass,' she thought, 'before aiu arrives. I shall catch another fish.' "

"Aiu?"

"C'est un bébé," Teuru explained. " 'One more fish I shall catch,' my mother said to herself, 'and then paddle to the village.' But you know, Beel, how it is with the paaihere - some times it bites hungrily and other times it only swims around the bait doing nothing. So it was with a very large one which Mama Ruau watched. It smelled of the bait and swam away and then came back and did it again. In this way a great deal of time passed and when at last the big fish was hooked and flapping in the canoe the pains returned very hard. My mother therefore took up the paddle and started back, going very rapidly, with the outrigger digging up a plume of water before it. Even so she did not go fast enough and before she was half way to our house she saw that it was no use hurrying any more. She stopped and took the wide-brimmed pandanus hat from her head and placed it in the bottom of the canoe. Then I came out and lay upon it."

Teuru ceased speaking. Other passengers were beginning to stir and before us the hills of Huahine were brightening to a radiant green.

"In the name of heaven," I asked impatiently, "what happened then?"

Her brows arched in mild surprise. "Why, nothing. I am here, that is all."

"But how did your Mama Ruau get home, child?"

"Now you are being silly. How else but in her canoe? When she had neared the village, father heard my crying. He went and got bamboo and limes. With the bamboo he cut the cord; the limes he squeezed in my eyes. He then wrapped me in a pareu and took me to the house which you will soon see."

"And your mother ... ?"

"Mama carried the fish." Teuru had for the last few moments been gazing down at her bare feet. She turned to the helmsman. "Have you a knife, Tau?" she asked. He handed one to her and she dropped to the deck to begin paring her toenails.

Though I'd not noticed it before, the roosters must have been sounding off at intervals from their lifeboat for many hours. Now, however, the sun came up from the sea in the direction of Tahiti and the birds burst out in tremendous chorus. Others of the livestock, perhaps scenting the lush and fertile island on our beam, raised their voices, and the passengers opened their eyes. The countess, unglamorous in the morning, swung her long legs over the engine-hatch bunk and the Great Dane leaped down to lope aft and sniff the binnacle. We were abreast of the pass and Captain Hema, now dressed in a fresh pajama coat, drew a shrill scream from the whistle. Tau spun the wheel. *Poti Raiatea* came about and made for a break in the foaming reef. For a moment sun-bright waves curled and crashed on the jagged coral to either side, then we were within the sheltered bay, swinging slowly in a wide circle beneath the mountains which hug the little port of Fare.

"Tero!" came the cries from on shore, faint above the chugging of the diesel. Tero! the native approximation of the still echoing shout of long dead whalers. Sail ho! The Raiatea boat - Huahine's only contact with the mysterious, fantastic outer world - is in! Small boys and young men were racing over the white sands to meet us at our berth.

Listing crazily again because of the multitude upon our decks who now rushed to the starboard rail, we glided up to the grassy bank before a small tin-roofed copra shed and there, with lines made fast to the rusted cannon of some forgotten ship of war, the old schooner came to temporary rest.

## XVI. *Call Him Viriamu*

WEEKS BEFORE our voyage began I had seen Tavae bending over Teuru's shoulder while, with a stub pencil and a piece of brown wrapping paper, she labored upon a letter destined for tall and venerable Marii, chief of their native village Haapu. Just how she learned to write (there were no schools on Huahine during the happy years in which she grew) I do not to this day know. But write she does, in her own language, pursing her full, curving lips, furrowing her comely brow, and sending the words traveling a course across the paper mountainous as her homeland. Marii, of all who dwelt in Haapu, could decipher the mysterious symbols. With elaborate silent mouthings he drew slow syllables from the crumpled message which he held close before his nose. At the end of each phrase he nodded vigorous satisfaction, as if at an arduous and almost impossible chore successfully completed, and spoke sonorously aloud his findings to the admiring group who squatted round about.

Our impending arrival had, I later discovered, been a topic of excited comment for many days, not only in Haapu, but throughout the entire island, and it is little difficult to reconstruct the scene.

Raising his grizzled head from Teuru's scrawl, and passing a hand over his flowing white mustache, Marii must have declaimed, "Tavae and his sister are returning from the capital, and with them is a popaa!"

"Eahaoia!" his audience surely exclaimed. "What do you know about that?"

"But why," some individual more curious or bright than the others doubtless asked, "why should a white man come to Huahine?"

"And why not?" Marii would have demanded sternly. "Are not the pigs here fatter and the fish sweeter than in any other place? Certainly he comes to fill his belly."

By noon of the day *Poti Raiatea* touched at Fare the popaa would, for a fact, have been glad to put something in his stomach. Unfortunately, however,

the committee of welcome from Haapu, who had paddled their outrigger canoes nine miles through the early morning dark to collect us and our baggage, had come upon the demijohns of vin ordinaire which were a part of our cargo. This discovery might well have caused interminable delay if I had not again exercised the foreigner's prerogative to be a killjoy.

Tavae was clearly disappointed in me when I flatly refused to permit the broaching of a second of the wicker-bound jugs. "No, Tavae," I said. "Think of those who remain waiting for you at home. You told me yourself you wished to make the whole village happy, and if you keep on there will not be enough to go around."

"There is no trouble, Monsieur Beel." He made an expansive gesture which showed he was nearing the cowboy stage of exhilaration. "The fifty liters of good wine we have brought will fill two hundred large glasses, and that is the number of us at Haapu."

True, Tavae had gone into lengthy calculations to arrive at the figure.

"But what I did not speak of," he added happily, "was l'amour."

"Well," I said a little testily, "what has that got to do with it?"

"We love," he explained patiently, while his friends grinned politely, uncomprehendingly, at his French. "And what happens?"

"I have no idea."

"Why, it is simple. There are babies; lots of them." He stooped to fill the half coconut shell he held and then smiled at me over the brim. "At Haapu we are half babes and children. Have no fear: for the grown tanes and vahines there will be wine to drown them."

Of course I never had the slightest intention of drowning anyone but, since there was now nothing to do about it, I sat down till the spirit should move the celebrants to take to their canoes. This occurred toward midafternoon when the heat and glare of the sun on the lagoons had lessened, and it is barely possible that it was for such event we had all along been waiting. Red wine in any quantity invariably tends to make me sleepy or rude, or both, and I had that day been careful to leave it alone, but the twenty-odd braves who manned our flotilla were in great good cheer as we drew away from the copra shed and the long vacant berth of the *Poti Raiatea*. There were eight or nine canoes, long hulls so narrow that one sat upon the two gunwales with feet crossed in the rounded bottom. As I examined the slender craft in which I rode it seemed to me that Teuru's Mama Ruau had performed a truly remarkable feat. Looking at Teuru herself, paddling in the bow before me, did not make it easier to understand. Her broad, evenly brown back tapered from shoulders wide as a man's to a slim waist; then she flared out in such manner that a considerable part of her overhung the canoe on either side. It was difficult to imagine her lying upon a hat in the bilge.

Tavae was seated astern sending us ahead with strong sweeps of his paddle while I loafed amidships, hemmed in fore and aft by assorted gear, and staring fascinatedly at the shifting colors of the coral beds over which we

glided. We skirted the shore so closely that at times the feathered tops of coco palms at the water's edge arched directly above our heads. Once we crossed a bay on which the breeze was fresh and small waves ran against the black-stained flanks of the canoes to send cool spray upon our faces. It was the bay of Havai and at its farther end was a cluster of thatch roofs, small in the distance, weathered gray by rain and sun. We passed no other settlement, but here and there were isolated dwellings, some of them stilt-supported, amphibious things half upon dry land and half shading lagoon shallows where small, brightly painted fish nuzzled the salt-encrusted piles. The inhabitants of these airy little structures of palm frond and bamboo had fair warning of our approach and passage, for in the lead canoe a boy had picked up his guitar, and our songs rose loud and lustily. Tahitian voices were never designed for use within confines, but in the open where the volume is both dispersed and softened their music gains real beauty. It was a paddling song to which the rough, hand-hewn blades dipped and rose, all in rhythmic unison. Perhaps similar melody sounded over the lonely South Pacifc in ages long gone by when the forebears of my companions first appeared upon these seas, driving their great twin hulled craft from some uncertain birthplace in the Oriental past. The words are old, old, and their ancient meaning is today obscured even as are the origins of the Polynesian race.

"From where have the Tahitians come?" you ask them. And there is no hesitancy in the quick reply. "From Havaiki; Havaiki is the homeland and there at death we once returned." "But where does it lie?" you may insist. The answer is then evasive, vague, even faintly troubled. "Why, it is there," your informant says, and sweeps his arm in a gesture which includes all the horizon in the west, "there where the sun goes through the sea."

But now we were unconcerned with what might be our final destination or from whence we may have sprung. It was enough to be alive in Huahine, and each singer knew that no other island in the whole wide world could be as fair and good. I knew it, too.

From each fare niau - from each thatch house - the friendly folk came forth to walk down on the sand and call to us; children waded out knee-deep to laugh and beckon.

"A mai tamaa!" their elders often called, and the travelers from Haapu always indicated thanks and declination.

"What is it?" I asked.

Teuru turned her head. "They say, 'Come and eat.' " Then, evidently reading my thought (a feat requiring little insight, for in the entire day nothing more than a crust of French bread and some weak coffee in a Chinese bowl had passed my lips) she added, "It is only politesse; one does not accept. Do not mind. At Haapu many little pigs are even now in the himaa roasting on the hot stones. There are surely also shrimps and crabs and lobsters, varo and vana and fei .... "

For the next half hour I consoled myself with thoughts of such fine things

browning in the earth oven. We then turned into a circuitous channel where corals rose within bare inches of the surface occasionally to brush our keel. Skillful piloting was then required and the singing stopped. No sooner had it done so than a babel of young voices reached our ears and, looking ahead, I saw that we had come to the end of the journey. A small wharf of coral blocks extended into the lagoon and upon the tall grass growing from its earthen fill were gathered that half of the population who had yet to reach wine-bibbing age. At sight of us the children leaped up and screeched the news of our arrival so that the most deaf oldster should not fail to know of it.

Teuru turned once more and looked at me. "Le voici," she said happily. "It is Haapu." Her eyes were filled with tears.

In the years which have passed since I have been often to her birthplace, but always when first it comes in view - and still more when the time has come to leave - I am bothered by a similar dimming of the eyes. As far as anyone now remembers no other white man has ever lived in Haapu. Perhaps a score have heard its name and have sailed on, incurious, to the spots of bruited glamour - to Bora Bora or Nukuhiva and the valley of Typee. Happily, the hurrying foreigner and time itself have passed the little village by. A Tahitian house is like a flowering plant and as impermanent: it rises with thatch bright green and walls of woven yellow, then, with the passing seasons, turns first brown and lastly gray; it withers, dies, and crumbles quite away. But, as if native hands no more than encouraged a ready-sown, recreative seed, the stilts, the poles and rafters spring up again, a new roof blooms. How many generations of homes have stood upon the ground called Haapu, I could not say. Yet this much, at least, is certain - the last are like the first, and here remains in the harassed present a tiny segment of olden Polynesia untouched, unconcerned, untroubled by the antics of the outside world.

"Teuru-iti! Tavae-itie!" the children called in loving diminutive. "Come - come quickly!"

The paddles of the Tahitian youth and girl bit deeply and we forged ahead of the escorting canoes. Dexterously Tavae brought the overloaded outrigger beside the wharf and Teuru leaped ashore. All in a moment her arms were filled with small brown bodies aquiver with excitement and affection. Each one she called by name, each one she pressed close so that her tears and laughter mingled with their own. Tavae's words came back to me: "We make love. Il y a des bébés; beaucoup de bébés. C'est simple." Indeed it was simple - and natural and beautiful - in this land where there are never too many, where one loves not only his own but all children no matter whose, and where there is no gift more treasured than a small, perfect, brown aiu.

Tavae was holding the canoe against the rough coral blocks. "The chief is waiting, Monsieur Beel," he said.

A tall and stately old man, the only adult I'd so far seen, rose from his seat upon the grass. Gravely, quietly, he embraced his niece, Teuru, and then with unhurried strides came to my side. In artless dignity he put forth his hands,

took mine, and drew me up before him. His voice was deep, a little husky - for reasons which I later learned - and filled with great sincerity. Speaking in his native tongue, while our hands still clasped, his dark eyes looked into my own. When he had done I turned questioningly to Tavae.

"Marii says that you come from a land of great riches and great wonders. Haapu, he fears, holds little - but all there is, is yours."

The children, fallen silent, stared up at us solemn and big eyed. A little boy of nine or ten rode, bareback, a small horse along the curving shore across the bay; a school of flying fish shattered the stillness of the water near at hand and skimmed to safety from some hidden foe; a company of white ducks plunged their heads into the warm, minnow-filled shallows; and from a single canoe far away in the direction of the barrier reef a human cry came faintly. It was an eerie sound, climbing, then descending, the queer minor scale on which the oldest chants are sung. I was to hear it often-sometimes breaking in upon the somnolent heat of day, sometimes interrupting the murmurous nights. And if ever I am far from the South Sea islands it will echo hauntingly within my mind, speaking of languor and carefree living, recalling with painful poignancy incredible beauty foolishly left behind.

"Please tell Marii the riches and the wonder are far greater here."

Tavae interpreted and the chief nodded quiet satisfaction, then inquired, "How is the popaa to be called?"

"His name," Tavae replied, quickly transposing those letters in the name William which do not exist in Tahitian, "His name is Viriamu."

## XVII. *A Matter of Introductions*

I WAS AWAKENED in the morning by a severe trembling of the house in which I lay. Presumably no one is fond of earthquakes, but my own feeling upon the subject is strong. Probably it is because I remember so well the disconcerting manner in which the island of Guam used, in my childhood, to rock about. I had been given to understand that Guam was constructed on the order of a toadstool and the thought that the stem might one day snap never entirely left me, despite the assurances of my naval officer father that, in his opinion, the place would continue afloat for a long time to come. When the temblors struck it was the custom of the Chamorros to rush into the streets and there fall on their faces. So now, although I was as many degrees south of the line as Guam is north, I started up, not with any real intention of face-falling, but anxious nevertheless to see what was going on. The walls and the floor, the entire house, engaged in a vigorous shimmy. On all sides the bamboo blinds were propped open and, looking out, I saw the villagers going unconcernedly about their small affairs. A man passed with a pole on his shoulder at the ends of which hung heavy clusters of green-skinned breadfruit; some women in the dwelling next door were quietly looking through each other's hair; down by the water several tots were trying to capture a white hen. No one but the hen betrayed any excitement. Perhaps, I thought, although the walls were jittering with increasing liveliness, this is an everyday occurrence. Determined to be level-headed as the rest, I walked deliberately to the door and down the steps of horizontally laid coconut boles to discover, the moment my feet touched the ground, that I was already outside the disturbed area. Surely the house was bewitched, and I turned to stare at it. A magnificent black sow leaned against one of the floor-supporting silts, energetically scratching her broad back while a half dozen young trotted here and there peering and sniffing down land-crab holes near by. Presently the sow lay down, the house came to rest, and the shoats to feed.

In Polynesia the kitchen is always under a separate roof. Mama Ruau's

was a little distance aft of the main house and from its eaves wisps of smoke curled lazily. Teuru put her head through the doorway and burst out laughing. "Your derrière, Monsieur Beel!" she cried. "How white it is!"

I was for the most part nearly as brown as a Tahitian at that time, but of course one's derrière is generally covered and remains hopelessly pale. It was accident, however, and never intention, that my pareu now parted in the rear exposing the troublesome part to the sun. Possibly I had, after all, left the shaken dwelling rather hurriedly.

"I can do it," I said as Teuru came out.

"Popaas can never do anything," she replied good humoredly and with a bit of tugging and twisting promptly set matters right. "There is soap in the coconut shell on the steps," she suggested, "and the river is not far down the bay."

"Is there also coffee?"

"Yes, when you return."

"You had better show me the way."

"No, you cannot get lost; just follow the shore."

"Where is Tavae?"

"Fishing on the reef," Teuru replied and she started back for the kitchen.

"Wait a minute! What shall I do if I meet people?"

"Do?" she turned at the doorway. "Just say 'ia ora na - may you live.' "

"Nom de Dieu! Can't you think of something new? When are you going to teach me the language?"

"If we stay a little while, Viriamu, you will learn quickly. Now go along and take your bath." She disappeared into the fare-tutu (I had managed to discover this signified a cook house) and I picked up the coconut shell and soap and started off down the trail muttering under my breath. The trouble was that I was heartily tired of "ia ora na." On the day before I had repeated the phrase so often that it had rung in my brain, plaguing my sleep the whole night through. I had grasped each adult hand, had patted each youthful head, repeating the polite words over and over again. The chief had presented me to the village males outside the sing-house, and that had been a long drawn-out affair in which each attempted in his welcoming address to outdo his fellows. I was already aware that Tahitians are most fond of the sound of their own voices, but the passion for oratory apparently increased with each mile one traveled from Papeete. When listening to an utterly unknown tongue it is something of a strain to wear for more than an hour an expression of intelligent and appreciative interest, and by the time I was led away to undergo what was to prove a still more arduous ordeal I was in a state of near exhaustion. The women were next.

A big-leaved purau tree grew not far from the sing-house, and beneath its heavy branches coconut fronds had been spread in a wide circle. The women, facing inward, sat upon the fronds. At the exact center of the circus of vahines stood a packing case which had once contained Canadian salmon, and to this

throne Tavae, Teuru and the chief conducted me.

"Where are you going?" I asked when all three started to desert.

"To see our Mama Ruau," Teuru replied.

"But what shall I do?"

"Just sit," she directed.

I did so - sat and sat and sat. The men in this part of the world do all the public speaking, so there was here no need to lend an uncomprehending ear. My present audience only stared and laughed and chattered among themselves. It was not even necessary to chant "ia ora na" - but the face-cracking proposition of wearing a smile for an interminable period, of beaming to right and left, before and behind, in an attempt to show friendlessness, was even more trying. With a perfect naturalness and unself-consciousness, which in other circumstances I should probably have considered delightful, they pointed out to each other various parts of my person. They discussed the popaa's hair and eyes and hands and feet; and it was, for my own composure, fortunate that I did not then understand to what further lengths their interested speculations went.

In the end I lighted a cigarette and did some staring myself, a decision which proved most rewarding. Forty-two females surrounded me. Pivoting on the salmon crate I counted them, stabbing deliberately with an index finger at each one and taking foolish pleasure in the mild reversal whereby the examiners became the examined. When I had swung back to the staring point with the tabulation complete it would have been a good place to stop but, due possibly to a sleepless night spent on the *Poti Raiatea* and a day crammed with new experience, I must by this time have become a bit light-headed. There is no other explanation for the monologue upon which, greatly to the enjoyment of the spectators, I then launched.

"Here," I declaimed, indicating clearly the subject of my scrutiny, "here we have a curious specimen: there must be a hundred kilos of her, maybe more. Surely she has accounted for a goodly number of the scampering legs which race about the village, yet she wears her hair, in which there's a deal of gray, just as do the girls. Two long braids fall forward upon her breasts; and the breasts, too, are like a girl's, firm, a little up-tilted - remarkable. Next we have a thin one whose pareu is drawn high under the arms, whose legs stretch out straight before her to end in feet quite perpendicular, with splayed, coral-gripping, earth-gripping toes like the spread stub fingers of a hand. Now we come to one who sits tailor-wise, her hair so long it trails the ground behind; and beside her is a girl suckling an infant that can be no more than three weeks old, the soles of its feet as white as mine."

I had come some distance round the circle when my eyes fell on a slender figure wrapped in a pareu of purest white on which were splashed large flowers of bright blue. The idiotic prattle died on my lips. Could she have been there when I made my first enumerating tour? It seemed unlikely, or I should have been arrested then. Certainly no man this side of eighty could

have failed to experience a quickening of the blood at sight of Titi, and I am not sure of the octogenarians either. She was exquisite, small, perfectly formed. Perhaps a shade darker than average, her skin had nevertheless a satin smoothness such that one instinctively wished to put forth a hand and touch it, stroke it, as one might caress a fawn. By which I do not mean to suggest that one could look at Titi in complete innocence. She may have been fifteen, but the tightly clinging cloth of the single garment made clear the fact that she was thoroughly a woman grown and her lips, solemn and near to pouting though they at that minute were, could speak no other language than invitation. Alone among her sisters, cousins, aunts and friends, she refused to gape at the popaa and kept her eyes downcast. Sitting with trim brown legs curled demurely under her, she slowly turned a yellow purau blossom in her hand. While the rest tittered and cackled and nudged each other, Titi remained lost in tranquil study of the lovely blossom - a part of the circle and yet, in a way, detached. I had determined before this to seek no longer to plumb the Tahitian mind and soul but in looking at Titi I felt to a surety that I beheld a Superior creature. She is, I decided, slightly bored; she takes no part in the lively chatter, her thoughts are far away. She is considering, perhaps, the wonder of the full-blown petals which she holds. Wrong again. Titi, it later developed, was troubled by no thoughts whatsoever, and lived in a happy void of complete mental becalmment. Possibly therein lies the explanation of her amazing beauty. In any case, discovery of the true state of affairs within her sculptured head could hardly because for disappointment; it was never ideas one would have exchanged with Titi. And what, after all, is more tiresome than a woman who insists upon scintillating all the time? People don't, as a rule, go to the South Seas in search of wit, and Titi's very inarticulateness was, I believe, her crowning glory.

Teuru arrived at last, and the assemblage broke up. The women collected their infants and the butter tins in which they kept native tobacco and pandanus leaf for cigarette-making. Singly and in groups they wandered off to their homes. The job was done: I had been properly introduced and inspected by every living soul in the village save one. Teuru's mother, according to village etiquette, stayed to welcome me in the fare where I was to sleep.

"Come," said Teuru, taking me by the hand, "Mama Ruau is waiting."

"What shall I say to her?" I inquired anxiously.

"What were you saying to all the vahines? You seemed to be doing very well."

"Oh, that was nonsense."

"Talk some to Mama Ruau; it would please her."

But the old woman who looked up to us from the white mat upon which she was seated in the doorway of her simple home was not one, I saw at a glance, to whom nonsense might be addressed. The folds of her plain mother-hubbard made a vast circle about her, overflowing the small square of matting onto the rough clean-swept, foot-wide boarding of the floor. Her hands - long-

fingered, expressive hands on which the veins showed clearly beneath the brown skin-were folded in quiet repose in her lap.

"Mind the second plank," Teuru directed, "it is not sound. Since my girlhood it is not sound; we must replace it one day."

I stepped carefully over the faulty board. Mama Ruau inclined her head toward a second mat like her own and I took my place upon it. Unhurriedly, low voiced, she spoke to her daughter, and as I listened it seemed to me that from no other lips I had seen had the language of Polynesia fallen so beautifully modulated, so color-filled, so near to music. Nor had I ever encountered among others of her race, in either degree or kind, the effortless, gracious dignity that was hers. No wonder it had brought her a lifetime of respect but - so I was aware even in the instant of our first meeting - it was never bearing alone, nor even great age, which made her honored on her island; rather it was a gentle, ready wisdom which the barrier of language could not hide. Mama Ruau never learned to read or write; she never held a book in her wonderfully capable and then rather tired hands. Sometimes she traveled beyond the confines of Haapu, but only to other villages growing on the shores of the same land. Huahine was to her the entire world. She knew it for nearly seventy years - knew it in all its moods, all its seasons, all its small details. It takes few hours to sail round the bit of up-tossed earth which encompassed all her days. In the immensity of the Pacific it is a little dot of insignificance. But is there elsewhere a dwelling place of man where life is more complete? Is there anything of value in human experience which here passed her by? She saw times of hunger and times of plenty; she saw sickness and death, love and child birth, flood and disaster, feasting and revelry. She gazed at the huge cloud shapes which come to hover on the mountains, and peered into the shadow-shot depths of the lagoons, marveling at the living sky and sea, feeling the nearness of the gods who made it all in such endless and wonderful diversity. She was loved by every man, woman and child who trod the fertile island soil.

"There is a thing," Teuru explained, "which our mother would have me say to you."

My eyes turned briefly to the girl, then came back to Mama Ruau who, while Teuru spoke in broken French, smiled at me, occasionally inclining her head as if to indicate that the words were truly hers. These were the words: "I have had many children, Viriamu - both boy children and girl children. As long as I was able I was glad to give them birth. I was glad also to see them grow and fish and play and at last take tanes and vahines for their own. One by one they have found their mates and have gone to this or that of our villages to build their homes and spread their sleeping mats. With each going the silence grows in this house where all began, with each going sadness enters to fill the place of the young voice that is heard no more. Now two of those who found life within my body have returned. That is happiness. But there is still more happiness, for with them they have brought another son. Be

with us for many days, Viriamu. Be with us as if you had yourself first drawn sweet breath beneath this shading roof. Be with us as long as you desire." And in reply I pronounced the only words of greeting or appreciation which I then knew.

Yes, I thought as I made my way along the trail toward the river, yesterday I repeated "ia ora na" full five hundred times. But facing Teuru's mother I had had no trouble with the unaccustomed syllables. I had in that minute been truly feeling and thinking, as well as speaking, the mellifluous, wind-soft tongue of Polynesia - and meaning it most earnestly: "Mama Ruau, may you live."

## XVIII. *Marii and the Eat-Food-Thing*

I HAVE BEEN a considerable while in reaching the old swimming hole with my soap still in its coconut shell, and I shall be sometime yet in arriving. Had I known what awaited there I should have hastened - perhaps even run.

For an hour or more before Tavae came to get me at Mama Ruau's the sound of sawing and hammering had echoed through the village, and as I followed him along the path leading back toward the wharf at which we had debarked the noise increased in volume.

"What are they building?" I inquired.

"It is an eat-food-thing," he said, giving literal translation to the Tahitian word, "a very big eat-food-thing."

We rounded a thick clump of hibiscus and came into a cleared space before the chief's dwelling, a structure of similar shape and materials to all others but far larger in size. Before it, two thirds completed, stretched a narrow table of prodigious length.

"But," I exclaimed, "I thought you always ate upon the ground."

"We do," said Tavae looking pleased, "but I have explained to Marii that popaas must have the food lifted up. So a table is made. It would have been done before," he explained with the patronizing worldliness gained from two years in Tahiti, "but these good people do not understand the ways of the white man."

"Why did you have to say such a thing as that?" I demanded, annoyed and disappointed, for there is nothing more pleasant than sitting upon fresh green banana fronds about a feast laid out in the accustomed manner.

"Leave it to me, Viriamu," he replied blandly. "We are going to do things right in Haapu."

To my way of thinking, of course, Haapu was completely "right" as we had found it, without any alterations whatever. But it was too late to do anything about the table and as we approached I saw, furthermore, that the sweating carpenters were pleased and proud of their innovation.

"And what is the chief's furniture doing out on the grass?" I asked uneasily, sensing - even before we came to the house that for this also Tavae was in some way responsible. The chief owned three pieces of furniture. There was an old mahogany rocker, or sit-thing. There was a brass-knobbed bed which held an enormous full-stuffed mattress and two mountainous pillows. (It was the only bed in the village and had never been slept in - not even by the chief who would never have thought of exchanging his cool mat for such a contraption - but it was, nevertheless, an object much admired and the cause of interested discussion of the white's man's preference for sleeping, as well as eating, aloft.) Lastly there was a wall clock with a large pendulum which was, I later observed, always wound and running and with a quick, business-like bong-bong-bong struck random hours, but the hands, somewhere along the line between Huahine and Japan, had disappeared. When we reached the door I was aghast to discover the reason of the evacuation. The floor which had supported the chief and his family for so many tranquil years was nearly gone, and in the rear was Marii himself briskly ripping up the few remaining boards for our dining table.

"You are a bright lad, aren't you?" I said to Tavae bitterly. "It was a great little idea, wasn't in"

"Oui, oui," he agreed readily, "Tavae is not stupid."

"Well, since you are so smart you can go and get that bottle of Martinique rum you had me buy in case you should get married while we're here."

He looked pained and surprised, and made no move.

"What's the matter? You haven't drunk it, have you?"

He hesitated. "No-o, not exactly; it has leaked a little."

"Then go and get it and bring it here. Marii and I will take care of what's left and you may sit and watch us."

He went off disconsolately, scuffing his bare feet, and was gone a long time. When he returned and handed me the liter he gave me at the same time a whiff of his breath confirming my suspicion that the leak was an inspiration of the moment and that Tavae was in truth not so stupid. Enough remained, however, to reward the chief for his heroic efforts in providing a new-fangled setting for the feast, and at Tavae's call he came out bearing the last plank on his shoulder. He gave it a triumphant heave in the direction of the table-builders, then, sitting on the ornamental bed, patted the balloon-like mattress to indicate that I should do likewise.

So we sat contentedly, the chief and I, handing back and forth the liter in which floated a few aromatic vanilla beans. Tavae squatted on his heels before us, his eyes following the bottle's passage with such sad consistency that I was soon unable longer to deny him access to the wedding cheer. "You are a great oaf," I informed him genially in English, "but here - go ahead."

"Merci, Monsieur Beel. Merci infiniment."

We joined, all three, in voluble conversation.

The sun was denting the sea close to the low-lying peaks of Raiatea some

twenty miles to westward and from there shone ruddy-bright on the under side of the drooping palm fronds all around us. It was my first experience of the extraordinary light with which Huahine invariably is filled in those few moments just before dusk slips up the mountain slopes to bring the night. The curved multi-lanced branches of the coconuts glowed as if, far from mere reflectors, they held within themselves the distant fire. The thatch houses, the beached canoes along the shore, the carpenters driving the last nails, the chief, Tavae, myself - we were all bathed, all swimming, all completely immersed in liquid-seeming air of emerald green. I put out my hand in a strange, unthinking gesture as if I would have touched the pervading luminous greenness. Surely, I felt, it was palpable, solid-solid as the sea would be about one if he lay at the bottom of a lagoon staring upward through the crystal water at a roof of verdant palms.

"How strange, Tavae," I blurted suddenly, "it fills the lungs like air, but it cannot be air we are breathing. How could it be air when we sit on the floor of a burning sea!"

"Now that is enough, mon vieux," he replied, gently removing the rum bottle from my hand. "Marii and I - we take care of what remains, n'est-ce pas?"

I was too much entranced with the spectacle of the day's ending to be indignant, and left them to their talk. How humans could talk when such wonders were going on was beyond me, yet they did so and it occurred to me that in one respect my fancy of resting fathoms deep was faulty. Where was the silence which should have held us fast? Far from stillness, a sort of raucous madness seemed to have seized the island and this, too, was a daily phenomenon at the hour of evening. Unnumbered thousands of myna birds, teetering on their perches in the mangoes, set up a shrilling which pierced the ears like nothing I had ever heard. Was it with joy the silly birds were crazed? Or did they, perhaps, thus protest the sinking of the sun? In any case they were not alone in finding strident voice. Roosters stood up and flapped and crowed; dogs, caught in the same inexplicable fever, raced baying between our legs; children screamed and shouted. Even Tavae and the chief - possibly in order to be heard above the swelling crescendo - were verbally belaboring each other at the top of their lungs.

Then, abruptly - so suddenly as to be fantastic - it was over. The sun went down. The birds quieted. So also did the dogs and children. One by one the cocks and hens fluttered into the lower branches of the village trees to sit sleepy-eyed and emit no more than gentle clucks. The exciting, bewildering green was gone and in its place was soft twilight. A group of half grown boys appeared carrying five-foot lengths of porous ban ana trunk which they planted in the ground about the festive board. Into the hollowed top of each upright shaft they stuffed bits of copra sacking, then doused the whole with coconut oil, The torches were ready to be lighted at the chief's command.

But Marii, although he now spoke in normal tones, was absorbed in

Tavae's discourse, breaking in every now and then to shake his head in earnest denial.

"He knows it is so," Tavae said to me, "but he is a stubborn old man. I have been telling him he should not drink the rhum sec. He is completely crazy about the rum. You know what he does? When he has sold his vanilla to the Chinaman in Papeete he takes the money to Quinn's and exchanges it all for as many liters as he can buy. He returns to Haapu and his wife says, 'Where is the pareu cloth? Where is the beef in tins and where the combs for your daughter's hair?' 'Mamu!' he will say, 'be silent.' And there he is right: a woman should not ask foolish questions. But no man should drink so much rum as Marii's vanilla buys. He is losing his voice, Viriamu."

I suspected at the time that Tavae had an ulterior motive in urging temperance upon our chief. The bottle was already nearly empty and I believed there was no more to be had in the village. That I was mistaken and that Tavae had charged to me and taken delivery of three other liters from my Papeete grocer is neither here nor there. But it may be that I also made a mistake in thinking him devious, because in the years that followed Marii's sonorous voice did in fact fade away. It was painful to watch, for if ever there was a man enamored by the sound of his own words, that one was the chief of Haapu. Many a night I have put aside my book at a late hour and turned out the kerosene lamp to let his deep-chested tones, echoing from the sing-house down the lane, lull me into sleep. And if I chanced to wake in the early morning darkness the impassioned, expressive flow of words would still be rolling on. I sometimes wonder if his listeners during these oratorical marathons - the men sitting with backs to the bamboo walls, arms folded on their bare chests, the women bending forward as they wove with clever fingers the mats and hats and baskets which we used - were more concerned with the actual content of his speech than was I. Perhaps not. Perhaps to them, too, the meaning of the words was insignificant, their sound as they spilled forth everything. Nor was I the only one whom Marii could dispatch to the land of Nod; for once, with no idea of what o'clock it might have been, I rose and felt my way down the street to peer into the long, dimly lantern-lighted room where he held sway. A group of twenty-odd were gathered there that night and although the chiefs rounded periods rose and fell with undiminished grandeur, I saw that he addressed a lone young woman whose hungry infant had kept her open eyed. All others lay upon the floor in attitudes of peaceful slumber. Very possibly Marii would not have been greatly distressed if even the last listener had succumbed, for he was him self by far his most appreciative audience.

It was tragedy, then, when his vocal cords began to play him false. He had, quite literally, lived for that voice. It had made of him a chief and a man of renown in all the Leeward Islands; it had made his days and nights a constant happiness. My visits to Haapu were often spaced by several months and it was some time before I remarked the change, but ultimately it was

inescapable. There came first a huskiness in Mari's tones and then a gradual diminution of power and volume till, when I saw him last, he conversed in a hoarse, pained whisper. Yet no suspicion of the finality of our farewells was in my mind when we stood on the little pier beside which a canoe waited to carry me down the coast where I should catch the Papeete-bound schooner.

"Viriamu," he breathed, "my ancestors are displeased with me. 'Old man,' they are saying, 'you have talked enough. Now be silent and come decently to your rest.' "

"But you are not really old, Marii," I protested. "Your strength is greater than mine this minute. Do not think such a thing." It was true: he was barely sixty and his health was unimpaired.

"No, dear friend," he insisted, "they are right, and it is not a matter for sadness. What good is a man who has nothing here?" He put a hand to his throat. "Already, you see, the life has gone out of me and I am of no use to my people. It is fit ting that I should listen and I have decided upon the day when *Poti Raiatea* again comes to Huahine. If it is not a trouble, come also, Viriamu."

"Of course I shall come," I replied and added, in my ignorance, "but only to chat and fish and eat together as we have always done before."

He smiled. "Good," he whispered. "Go, then."

We pushed off and headed through the narrows down the bay. Twice I turned and each time he raised his arm and waved us on. It happened, however, that on the day three weeks later when *Poti* next left Tahiti to make its voyage with the wind, the steamer from America was lying in the harbor and I remained behind to receive long-awaited mail. More weeks passed before I once again set foot in Haapu to learn that the chief was no longer there. Such things have ceased these many years to astonish or surprise, but it was far different then and the thought of the casual manner in which I had put aside the promised sailing brought a terrible wrench of pain. Marii, who in all his life had never known the meaning of time, had been most punctual in his last engagement. He died quietly at evening of the day when *Poti Raiatea* pushed her blunt bows through the Huahine pass.

But on the night of our first feast Marii could still make himself heard clear across the bay. "Let the torches be lighted!" he roared and, rising, led me proudly to the head of the speedily improvised table. Now its planks sagged with the weight of platters of roast pig, of steaming yams and plantains, of raw fish steeped in the juice of limes, of mounded breadfruit and sweet poi. There were bamboos filled with the fermented sauce of coconuts, pyramids of sea-porcupines from which the quills had been removed, great piles of crabs and curiously armored sea-centipedes. Husked white drinking nuts held in Chinese bowls rested on a flower-sprinkled cloth of freshly gathered leaves. In the center rose a small mountain of gorgeous bougainvillaea and from flambeau to flambeau round the board hung streamers of grasses which swayed on the light, outward moving airs that now replaced the trades.

Only men sit down to the feasts of Haapu, a relic of ancient times when strict tapu denied the sexes to mingle at even the simplest repast, and the dull red, smoke-tipped flares threw warm unsteady radiance on their naked, firm-muscled shoulders, on long sun-darkened arms, on brown hands grown strong in the wielding of bush-knife and harpoon. They shone, too, on the luxuriant, coconut-scented hair of the women who brought the oven-roasted food and on the garlands of jasmine and tiare which adorned their own and their tanes' heads. Here, held within the narrow boundaries of the flares, was every thing for which a mortal man could ask. In all the village we were fewer than two-hundred-fifty souls and if others then existed elsewhere on our wheeling planet we had no way, nor even desire, of knowing it. Never that I can remember had the sense of closely knit and real companionship been quite so keen.

Marii looked up through his bushy brows. "Friends," he proclaimed impressively, "we have good food in great variety from out the sea and off the land. Chew it thoroughly. Tamaa maitai - eat well!"

## XIX. *The Docile Nymph at Hina's Pool*

AFTER LEAVING the village, the trail to the river followed for a short distance the irregular shore line and then branched off inland so that all sight of the water was lost. It was preter naturally quiet and I realized that the low drumming of seas beating upon the barrier reef, a sound incessantly in my ears since first arrival, failed to penetrate the thick jungle which threatened to obliterate the path from either side. Here lantana wound round giant forest mapes, breadfruit trees and stout purau. I skirted groves of oranges and limes, guava and acacia, and met no one on the trail. Evidently Haapu, even after a night of feasting, went early to its bath. And so much the better. It was good, for a while, to be alone and to leave behind the commingled voices, animal and human, of the village. Teuru had said the stream ran not far away and I slowed my pace to prolong the welcome solitude.

It was singularly restful and I strolled along listening to the hum of unseen insects and enjoying the warmness of the sun slanting through the foliage. Under such circumstances a young man - and even one not so young - is likely to indulge in pleasant fancies. In reviewing the night just past I was, however, imagining nothing.

Released at last from the hospitality of the chief's table, I had returned through the dark to Mama Ruau's house. A small hurricane lamp with wick turned very low burned upon the floor near the always open doorway, and close beside it sat the old woman herself, as if she had not moved since last I left. She looked up as I entered, the deep lines of her face etched heavily by the feeble light, and murmured a quiet greeting in which I caught little more than the word " ... Viriamu." Beyond her the room dissolved in shadow and above, where the peaked roof rested on its rough-hewn ridgepole, the converging thatch held darkness quite complete. Yet despite the obscurity I could distinguish a number of pareu-covered forms scattered here and there upon the floor. Some were very small and lay curled with heads upon their arms (always there were children sleeping at Mama Ruau's, but they were a

casually shifting population and never two nights running the same); others were larger and at least one billowing female shape lying in a corner was of grand proportions. If, as Mama had said, her own brood had largely left Haapu for other villages, the danger of loneliness seemed more imaginary than real and for a moment I stood irresolute, fearful, if I moved, of treading upon some undiscovered tenant and wondering if room still remained where a man might stretch himself to rest.

Teuru came in. "What do you wait for, Monsieur Beel? There is your sleeping mat; lie down."

"Where?"

"You stand upon it."

"Oh." Then I saw that another woman had followed her into the house. The face was hidden in shadow but I knew suddenly that I had seen that slender body before. Impulsively, I stooped and, whipping up the lantern, held it close before her.

"What is *she* doing here?" I exclaimed in foolish surprise. It was the same girl who had halted my inspection of the females of Haapu upon that very afternoon. The dark pupils of her eyes narrowed as she stared at the tiny flame and I looked far down within them. Never before had I seen eyes which smoldered with colored fires such as the sun sets alight in coral studded lagoons; never had I seen eyes in which shadows passed and repassed like filming clouds across the sky.

"It is only Titi," said Teuru. "I am her mama faa-amu."

"Her what?"

"Her mother-who-gives-to-eat. She was a gift to me when I was just eighteen, and when she had not as many months. Now will you go to bed, Viriamu? I will get you a pareu for cover." Teuru went to a wooden chest against the wall. A little tinkle of bells sounded as she turned the lock and in a few moments she was back with the length of green cloth. Apparently I had not in the meantime stirred. "Eh bien," she said.

Slowly I lowered the hurricane lamp and Titi's eyes followed its descent till the heavily lashed lids quite covered them. I succeeded in turning to Teuru. "But whose child is she, really?" I asked.

"Mine."

"What about the woman who bore her?"

"Oh, she has plenty of others."

The idea of indiscriminate adoption to right and left was still novel to me and a bit difficult of assimilation. "And are you the one who tells her what she can do and what she can't, who instructs her, who will decide when she is old enough to find a tane?"

"Certainly. Do you find it strange?"

"Yes, I do. You're hardly old enough yourself to have good sense." This was not strictly true. Teuru, according to island standards, was a mature woman.

She smiled. "I know what is good for Titi. Would you like her?" she asked, and gave her attention to the two mats which she spread, one on either side of that on which I still woodenly stood.

It was in some way disconcerting to have such a lovely being as Titi handed out, as it were, upon a platter. Just why it should have been, however, I do not exactly know, and today I tend to lean to the opinion that one should gratefully accept, without question, whatever the gods extend. My answer must have been evasive, because Teuru lay down and then, drawing the cotton print over her, remarked matter-of-factly, "Well, there is no hurry. Come, let us sleep." Titi took the place on the other side and, after only moderate hesitation, I disposed myself between them.

A few minutes passed before Teuru raised her head. "Titi!"

"E, mama."

"Say your prayers."

Obediently the girl murmured her prayers and, stealing a glance at Teuru, I saw that her lips also moved, but silently. When the young voice had ceased Mama Ruau, who had remained impassively smoking her last cigarette all the while, gave a flip to the glowing leaf and sent it out into the night. (From later observation I know that a watchful land-crab immediately rushed to seize the bit of pandanus in quick pincers, only to drop it as hurriedly and retreat disappointed into its hole.) She turned the wick of the lamp still lower, then, guarding and protecting her household against wandering spirits of the dark, laid her old head down in the doorway.

For long my eyes refused to close and I continued staring upward, feeling, yet not seeing, the interlaced covering of sweet dried fronds which shielded us from the faint blueness of the stars. I was barely ninety miles from a port into which clanking steamers make their way from the four corners of the earth, ninety miles from a waterfront town-crossroads of the sophisticated wanderers who move in constant restlessness over the modern earth. But I had slipped back a hundred years in time. Haapu, and villages like it, had lived before ever Papeete, the "water-basket," grew to contain the ships of foreigners and their noisy crews. When Captain Cook touched here such villages had pulsed with life for centuries before, even as they do today. It may, I thought, have been in just such a dwelling as this that the great navigator slept ashore, and I re called a passage of his *Voyages*: "When they have strangers in the house, they generally keep a light burning all night, possibly as a check upon such of the women as they wish not to honour them with their favors." A small, wavering flame still burned in every house about me, but I had to smile. How could you have been so mistaken, captain, as to its reason? Had you not heard of the tupapaus which roam the darkened islands? Did you not know these ghosts to be two in kind, the friendly and the voracious, and that only fire will prevent the latter from leaving the desolate wastes of night to seek warmth where humans slumber?

Mama Ruau's face was turned from me as if, not content with the magic of

the tin lantern alone, she kept personal vigil for any wraiths which might be strolling beneath the motionless palms. Yet her steady breathing showed that, for a while at least, her cares for us all had slipped away in quiet sleep. I, too, soon slept and opened my eyes only once when Titi, turning, unconsciously curled her smooth brown arm around me - and then just to replace it gently where it came from.

On the next morning when I stepped into the cool valley down which a stream of clear cold water made its rambling way, Titi, having pleasantly occupied my thoughts throughout most of the walk, temporarily deserted them. Although I had felt completely shut off from the sea while following the trail, it was now apparent that at no time could I have been far inland. Only a few hundred yards away the river, tranquil - flowing in the last stages of its descent from a region of clouds and springs, joined without a ripple the broad lagoon. Near at hand the stream-bed was strewn with large, flat-topped boulders upon which I could picture gossiping women seated as they washed and flailed bright-patterned prints, but at this hour there were none and I looked about for the best place for a plunge. Hundreds of firm, toughened bare feet had worn a path through the lush grass and watercress which lined the bank, and with my own white soles I followed it a short way into the interior to a grove of giant Tahitian chestnut trees which roughly circled a widening of the river. Here the great exposed buttress system of their roots dipped into deep water, and overhead heavy green foliage made a solid blanket of shade. A pair of white ducks, presumably come by the sea route, swam decoratively back and forth, heads held high, and not once exploring the silt of shallows for whatever it is they find there. A delicious coolness filled the air of this sequestered place and the dark crystal of the pond gave promise of bracing chill in its embrace. Quickly I tossed aside the pareu and dove, then broke the surface with deliberate quiet: an echo of splashing waters still rocked softly among the massively towering trunks, and I smiled at the strategy which had caught the fleeting sound. Little wonder that echoes played over the pool of Hina, goddess of the moon, for it was a fey locality - a woodland home for elfin sprites or water-nymphs, and even a popaa would hardly have been surprised to glimpse them playing in the friendly obscurity which lay within the protective folds of the mapes' aerial roots. That, I say, would not have been so startling; but who would ever have thought to see such a creature borne upon a *boat*?

The fairy craft had remained hidden while I made use of the soap and replaced it in the coconut shell, while I plunged a second time, while I bound on again the pareu. Then, when I was about to turn away, it appeared, drifting, silently materializing from the dense shade of the opposite shore. It was a dugout no more than six feet long with the graceful, double ended shape of those polished wooden bowls called umetes into which the white meat of coconuts is grated and at first the kneeling figure which it held had also he color and immobility of finely polished wood. But whereas the carven deities

of Polynesia are invariably hideous, this small floating idol with smoothly sculptured limbs and motionless, finely chiseled head was far otherwise. When the toy canoe glided over the dark mirror of the little tree-lined lake, and when it neared through the forest twilight, I saw - even before Titi moved to dip her hands as paddles on either side - that it was no artist's image of loveliness at which I looked. It was living, breathing beauty such as every man who toils with paints or wood or stone, or even words, must dream about and never, more than once in a lifetime, find. Tii, too, had swum in Hina's river on that morning. Yet, though the pareu about her waist clung wetly to her body and though faintly shimmering drops were sprinkled dew-like on her breasts and over the white flowers which fell from her throat upon them, the cloudy mantle of hair rested dry and light upon her shoulders, a phenomenon which struck me as so curious that in good English I said aloud, "How can it be; Titi, that your hair is dry?"

And Titi, of course, was unable to explain that the hair of all Tahitian women is waterproof by reason of the scented palm oil with which they treat it. "Eaha?" she said.

"What?"

"Eaha?"

I asked about that word later. We were merely saying "what" back and forth at each other and getting nowhere. But Titi soon showed that she could make progress without benefit of words. She brought the dugout to the bank, stepped ashore and, coming directly to me, took my hand in hers and drew my arm about her. She turned her face upward and presented slightly parted lips. I looked again into the eyes in which, with the aid of a lantern, I had seen fire and stars and other wonders. In the subdued light with which we were now surrounded they were large and clear and dark as the pool beside us; they were also near to expressionless, and if any thought at all swam in their liquid depths it was not to be detected. There was an air of tranquil, untroubled obedience about her, and after a moment of patient waiting she raised her hand and touched my cheek, then put a finger to her soft, receptive mouth. "Here it is," she seemed to be saying, "if you are interested."

Suddenly I was quite sure that the idyllic meeting was more than simple, happy chance. I'd not yet discovered the delightful and very old legends of the islands in which lovers are for ever meeting at bathing springs or beside chirruping brooks but, even without the authority of ancient myth, I could see that as a setting it was hard to beat. I was also confident of detecting Teuru's thoughtful, practical influence, and could imagine her saying, "Be nice to the popaa, Titi." "How shall I be nice to him, Mama?" and then Teuru had undoubtedly become explicit.

"Come on," I said to her submissive pupil, "let's go."

"Eaha?"

"What?"

"Eaha?"

I threw up my hands in despair but pointing first at Titi, afterwards at myself, and lastly in the direction of the village I succeeded, after several repetitions, in putting over the idea of return. A shadow crossed the girl's placid features and, ever so slightly, her lips trembled. The current of uncomplicated thought stirring in Titi's mind was then plain enough to read. Had she failed to learn her lesson? Had she done something wrong? What would Mama Teuru say now ... ? At that moment she was more appealing than ever before and I was perilously close to forgetting Haapu village altogether.

When, walking single file with Titi in the lead, we at last reached the neat rows of seaside houses, I observed that from many of the doorways passed, women promptly issued carrying bundles of washing, and set off down the trail over which we had just come. Clearly, not Titi alone, but all of Haapu had received instructions; and now the coast was clear.

We entered the fare tutu beside Mama Ruau's house and Titi went to a corner where she sat down disconsolately with eyes bent upon the ground. At Teuru's inquiring glance she gave a small shrug of her shoulders and shook her beautiful head.

Teuru lifted the coffee pot off the open fire and then looked at me very squarely. "Maa-maa," she said briefly.

About that word, also, I made later investigation. It means soft-in-the-head.

## XX. *Underwater Shadow Play*

HUAHINE-NUI, or big Huahine, is that larger part of the island at which the schooners call; Huahine-iti, little Huahine, supports the village of Haapu and a few other scattered settlements. A narrow salt channel separates the two. But there is as well a vertical division of the small green world which the ocean-battling reef encloses. There is the kingdom of the upper air, of cloud-swept mountain and wind-tossed palm where birds and beasts and men, all unabashed by the immensity of space in which they live, give never-ending voice. Below the lagoon is a nether kingdom, no less brilliant, where the sun strikes-down, no less majestic in its valleys, canyons and fading watery distances, still more filled with feeding, mating, warring - but inarticulate - life. Mystery and the slumbering loveliness of centuries cling to that part of Huahine which rides above the seas; one senses the thinness of the veil which hazily distinguishes the present from the past and, at times, the entire island seems numerous with the ancient dead. But dip below the cleaving water surfaces and the mystery is of another sort. Here is the unknown, the unguessed, and beauty, with the ever-present hint of danger, becomes more stark.

One might spend a lifetime in Huahine and at its end leave mile upon mile of its tortuous lagoons unexplored. When the total of his days has finally been added, many a native's span has been near equally "divided between the land and sea, between the upper and lower kingdoms. Yet the last morning on which he dives, with spear in hand and goggles pressing on his eyes, may show him fish and ferns and corals new and surprising as those he saw when, a boy of four or five, he first tentatively ducked his head to stare through the transparent shallows. There are no limits to the variety of this under-seascape, to the variety of its shifting shadow colors or its graceful finned inhabitants, and a single man shall never know it all. Still, with one small segment of the whole, I claim a certain intimacy. There is a place, and it lies not far from Haapu, where the outer reef swings inward toward the land, compressing the

lagoon to a passage which six canoes laid stem to stern may bridge. There storms send waves leaping across the channel to slide up a sanded beach and hiss about the gray boles of closely growing palms. But during calms the slow breathing of the sea against the deep-rooted barrier causes no more than a sympathetic trembling of the waters held within. At such times we went often - Tavae, Teuru, Titi and I - they to try their luck with hook and line and swift harpoon, and I to swim in unceasing wonder through the labyrinth of coral cities and jungles where the fishes made their home.

Tavae had taken infinite pains in carving, sanding and polishing the pair of water-glasses with which he proudly presented me one day. They were fashioned of the finely grained, rose-colored wood called miru. Long oval lenses fitted snugly in the beds, slanting in such a way that vision was far extended on either side. Tough cord of twisted, fibrous coconut husk bound the goggles close about one's head. Many times, in the process of construction, Tavae had studied the spacing of my eyes, the bridge of nose, the breadth from temple to temple, and the result was a tailor-made job through which, even under the pressure of as many fathoms as I could ever sound, no drop of water might penetrate. Simple things they were, to be sure, yet capable of miracles. In giving them to me Tavae gave far more than bits of wood and glass. Rather, he opened twin windows to the sea, and I shall never forget the morning I first tried them.

We had come early to the favored fishing ground and beached the canoe upon the shore. Tavae, his red pareu bound tight and small about his loins, his long single-pronged spear in hand, waded out swiftly and was soon swimming in deep water, head down, in search of fat paaihere or crimson iihi. With a freshly plaited palm leaf basket slung on her arm and carrying a bamboo pole, Teuru made her way to a coral plat form a few yards from the beach. Thoughtful of shade alone she had jammed squarely on top of her head the wide-brimmed hat of disintegrating coco leaf which she reserved for these occasions; her color, as she knew, was dark enough without aid of tanning sun, and she had no desire to be mistaken for a woman of Martinique. Titi, garbed exactly as Tavae and grasping a spear only slightly shorter than his own, rushed with a glad shout into the lagoon. Lithe and quick as the fish she pursued, she struck out after the lad. And that was a curious thing about Titi: on dry land her attitude was always one of complete and disinterested repose, but the moment her slender body made contact with salt water it was as if an electric current passed through her. She was then all excitement, all energy, and watching her one enviously remembered how it had felt to be very young and fairly bursting with joyous overflowing life.

Empty-handed, I strode out to Teuru's pedestal.

"Don't come here, Viriamu," she admonished promptly. "How am I to catch fish while you slosh about scaring them all away? Go and play elsewhere; go and swim and make those noises of which you are so fond."

"Noises?"

She swung the pole and sent the baited hook far out. "Like a whale."

"Oh, yes." I was not really paying much attention to Teuru and stood with the water-glasses still pushed back on my forehead, staring out over the faintly ruffled channel in which Titi and Tavae's dark heads occasionally popped up, then disappeared again.

A happy cry broke suddenly from the girl beside me. "Aue!" She gave a quick fillip to the pole and a shining, silvery fish described a great arc about us and came to rest in her hand. The next minute it was struggling in the leafy basket. "Possibly I am wrong, Monsieur Beel," she conceded. "Some people there are who attract fish with their good smell. And those who have the good smell should be careful; it is also pleasing to sharks." She smiled - as if she had said something quaintly amusing and I pushed off into deeper water, hoping that whatever scent went with me was overpoweringly bad.

I pulled Tavae's goggles down and dove. Instantly the mutter of the sea upon the reef was gone. So also was the swish of little waves across smooth beach sands and the faint rattling of wind through lazily dipping fronds. Instead there was utter quiet, utter calm. A brief second - and the change was greater than any journey of a thousand miles upon the surface of the earth might bring. A few feet - and the world of revolving seasons, of heat and cold, of turbulent airs and pounding surfs was left behind and a region gained where, since the beginning of time, the same unaltering suspended hush had reigned. One thing only was shared with the land above: here, too, was night and day. Now it was bright, dazzling, sun-drenched morning. Across the flat, whitely burning bottom sands ran a delicate tracery of wavering shadow, fine as spider's web and even less substantial, sole reminder of breeze-stirred cat's paws overhead. Far from diminishing luminous day, the filmy vein-like network which spread out upon the lagoon's shimmering floor seemed to enhance and to diffuse the filtered, then reflected, light.

An amateur diver's time below the sea is fleeting short, and perhaps it is this knowledge that in part accounts for the superlative quickness and receptivity of his mind and eye. Perhaps, also, it is because other senses are lost to him that all seem merged in that of sight alone. There is so much to see, the seconds of held breath so few. His eyes are ravenous. They seek to cram all experience into the span of moments, and this is true whether the diver wears a skin of brown or white, whether he hunts for the richest beds of rough, half-buried shell or goes swimming down in search of no more tangible thing than beauty. Yes, the seconds are brief but always, in retrospect, the periods of monotony in a life appear most quickly gone. It should not be surprising, then, if the wonder filled moments a man may dwell in submarine Huahine seem arrested, prolonged, delightfully lingering.

In other books I have given way to a consuming desire to get below the southern oceans. When Teri Taro swam the coral valleys of his native Bora Bora the sights he saw were, of course, the same which I had myself there thrillingly discovered. So also with Rata of *The Ship of Flame*, who walked

beneath the waters of the bay of Matavai; I, too, have met just such witching plants as the tall, swayed ferns which formed his old-woman-of-the-sea. The fascination of this other world has never waned, and the knowledge that not twice will it prove the same finds me expectantly, excitedly, submerging whenever the chance affords. Doubtless, however, there is little reason to think that such experience should be equally ever-fresh when one seeks to pass it on in words. And still, I am as unable to resist the temptation of re-exploring those alluring regions in memory as I was formerly to savor them in fact.

On that morning when I first peered through the fabulous goggles I slid through liquid emerald green into a forest of the great toadstools which the slow, aeon-working coral builds. Near at hand was one whose strange outspread umbrella top could have measured no less than thirty feet across. Over its mottled brown and rose and purple surface I swam to drop past the crenate rim and follow down the shaded, curiously shaped stem. Perhaps it was overactive imagination that gave to the score of flaring-domed pillars surrounding me the air of living things; perhaps it was still more riotous imagination which showed them as so many caryatids bearing rounded roofs flecked with glints of turquoise and fire-glowing amber. It was almost possible to believe that at another time I might have surprised them in life-betraying motion, that it was mere accident they should be temporarily frozen still in a mold of solid glass. Even so, I sensed that they were watching me and as I wound my way between them I twice looked quickly over my shoulder: surely, in covert haste, several of the aloof and wary creatures had made a sudden move? I smiled at such a fancy, or so I think I must have done; but I cannot be quite positive. Whether it is the held breath, the dwindling supply of oxygen within his lungs, or whether it is a spell which the deep puts upon him that causes a certain sweet delirium I will not hazard to guess, but the fact remains that all knowledge or awareness of an existence in the upper air is washed from mind as if it had never been, as if all the universe held no other element, no other experience than that which presently so tightly clasps both brain and body. The brief dashes to the surface which a man is forced to make do not serve to break the trance or to impose reality. There is an instant of blindness while water streams over the lenses of the goggles; he draws great draughts of the warm and fragrant air, then plunges back and is lost again in the mystic thralldom. Unquestionably one is not, at such times, quite sane.

Whatever may have been the coloring of Grecian dryads, the brine-spawned variety to whom I repeatedly returned were of varying shades of bronze and gold. Some rose close together upon the bottom's unruffled sands, so near that their grotesque outflung coronets touched and merged one with the next, welded in friendship old as time. Others stood proudly solitary, tirelessly upholding with their many arms the heavy hemispheres like shields against the sun. And if proof were needed that the bizarre yet stately mushroom people did not always remain fixed as adze-hewn idols, there were

the scattered young to bear mute testimony. Beside one of these I measured myself: we were of nearly even height, pigmies compared to the loftily mature. All stood peering through the greenish light, peering with hundreds of slanting, half-opened eyes of cobalt blue-clams deeply bedded in their unyielding flesh. But always at my approach, in keeping with their game of feigned insentience, the molluscs' nacreous lids snapped shut and the statuesque toadstool-bearers persisted unmoving as pillared stone.

Fish there were, too, whose purpose seemed that of decoration. Through the trailing mosses hanging tress-like from the underside of each massive parasol they wove their way, minute rainbow particles which, when they strayed to the sun-brightened periphery, became flashing, animated jewels. Others, large as the outspread hand, floated nearly motionless, like flowers of yellow and silver-white set against the dark sea swimming hair.

Such things as these may in all truth come close to causing one to forget where he belongs-to forget, at least, till the lungs are near to bursting and he must beat a quick retreat to fill them once again. But if he has difficulty planning his movements in a vertical plane, how much greater is his indecision when he has gained the lagoon's smooth floor to find countless beckoning vistas stretching away on every side, each equally alluring, each an invitation to explore the pristine secrets that it holds. Which trail to follow, which winding coral-sided valley penetrate, which grass-grown plain where shadowy finned flocks browse should he elect?

I was beset by such a problem when I had left the reserved toadstool folk behind. Looking shoreward I could see the shelving sands rise till they ended in a line of misty white where small waves crumbled airily against the beach. A little to the left was a mound that rose within a foot of the surface, and planted upon it were two brown legs about which a bit of red pareu trailed. They were severed neatly at the knee. As I watched, a baited hook descended from the outer sky; a plump black fish approached it cautiously, then slyly snapped it up. Abruptly he was jerked from his happy hunting ground to take his place, I knew, within Teuru's waiting basket.

Turning toward the north, roughly parallel to the run of the coast, I faced a vale of shifting lights in the center of which a castle of incredible magnificence lifted slender spires to pierce the lagoon's sharply defined upper boundary and taste the winds above. It was replete with corbeled battlements, with moats and bartizans, with bridges and soaring, fern covered buttresses. Flamboyant arches opened in the lower donjon walls and gothic windows perforated the graceful, slim-shafted towers. All this I saw and yet, in manner most perplexing, first clearly, then hazily as if through drifting fog, and not till I had come up to the outlying defenses did I discover the reason for the strange phenomenon. Like clouds which circle an island's highest peaks, banded swarms of near transparent fish - fish no larger than dainty butterflies - swam lazily round and round the aquatic coral Camelot, at one moment screening and obscuring with their faintly opaque bodies, then, through a rift

in their serried ranks, disclosing sun-dappled turrets and minarets in stark relief. There was something of the nature of a magic lantern in this intriguing, repetitive shadow-play: a tantalizing blurring of the tableau as some giant hand moved the slide of colored glass, followed by an instant when motion ceased and focus cleared to show a picture such as might have been lifted from the pages of the most fancy-free of children's books of fairy tales or chivalry. Terraces and bastions and jutting barbicans shone softly with a coppery glow, tints of rose, of purple and subdued blue trembled on the walls of porous, capriciously self-elevated masonry. All reality in these seconds took sudden flight; one was left staring in unbelief and on the point of peopling the chimerical edifice with kings and pages and fair damsels, with Merlins, Arthurs and Guineveres. But suddenly the colors faded and the medieval city, thought lost and here refound beneath the sea, assumed a somber hue as if the lantern's limelight had abruptly been extinguished. Dusk gathered about the maze of spires, deep twilight welled up from the courtyards and, no longer a castle of philandering, jousting knights, it was become a grim fortress of the darkness-abiding Cimmeriae. A cloud had crossed the sun. Perhaps I should have attempted to remain, or to have returned, to witness the transformation of the scene back to the lovely and light-hearted one I had first glimpsed. But I had by this time, in successive dives, come very near and, gazing into a cleft now turned Stygian black, discovered two unblinking eyes regarding me. The head of a monster eel was suspended in the narrow slot, its mouth expectantly agape in an evil grin which exposed twin rows of razor teeth and, my waning enthusiasm for the haunted place departing quite, I shot up through five fathoms to push back the goggles and join once more the land where living creatures' blood is warm.

I shook the water from my ears and the sounds of wind and surf came to fill them deliciously. The sun appeared from its brief hiding to set the lagoon again asparkle and Tavae called lustily from the reef and waved his spear.

"The fish are big; come here and see!"

## XXI. *Ghost-Fish on the Reef*

I REFITTED the glasses into the grooves they had pressed about my eyes and, swimming a leisurely crawl. set out toward the barrier. Moving in this way I looked again through the windows of Huahine's second kingdom, but it was no longer the same, for I was now a surface traveler with the view of a passing bird. It was the way of a simple spectator and I felt as removed, as little a part of the submarine, as if I sat prim and dry in the protection of a prosaic glass-bottomed boat. This sense of detachment and security may in part account for the fact that, when I crossed a channel where the water deepened into blue, neither the sight of two pale-flanked sharks cruising immediately below nor the vague shadow of a more distant huge winged thing which I knew to be a ray caused a hastening of my pace. Lest I should be thought either daring or foolhardy I should add, however, that the sharks of the region display, as a general rule, small interest in mankind. Far otherwise in the Tuamotus a few hundred miles away where divers seek deep lying shell, where a man carries a long knife tied close against him and often the dread cry of "Mao!" is heard. Why the Huahine breed of sharks, images of their ugly and vicious atoll brothers, should be so docile of temperament I cannot say, but more than once during a moonlight swim their rough, sandpaper hides have brushed my limbs and, so far, I am still all of a piece.

Titi and Tavae were standing on the reef when I came up to them. He reached down a thick wrist for me to grasp and drew me up beside him.

"You are just: in time," he said. "Look." And he pointed to the farther side of the irregular causeway where, calm as the day was, languid seas rose three or four or even five feet high before they dropped exhausted to disintegrate with a sibilant rush of exhaled breach upon the pool-dotted barrier. Between ourselves and the hazily distant Raiatean shore a score of miles away, the ocean spread in a nearly flat: but gently heaving plain, and only at our doorstep, no farther off than a spear's smart throw, did waves come mysteriously full-formed into being. In some way their spontaneous birth

seemed to hinge upon the passing of the one most recently dissolved, for never did two exist concurrently. For moments I watched their deliberate shoreward march before I discovered the reason of Tavae's words and the reason, too, of the cautious, crouched advance which, with readied harpoon, he now made toward the sea. I was about to follow, then stopped obediently and remained still beside her when Titi put her hand upon my arm and shook her lovely head.

In each sheer-sided, glass-walled wave, when it had come midway on its brief journey to destruction, there appeared a trio of parrot fish more beautiful, I believe, than any I had ever seen. They were of a blazing green even more brilliant than the translucent mansion of jade which an indulgent mother ocean uplifted for their sport and play. Near the tapered crest, but still safely encased by their native element, they rode serenely, happily high above their less imaginative fellows, and only a bare instant before the wave's collapse would they desert to dart below and take places within the next succeeding.

Dangers lurk on a reef's seaside slopes, for there the corals part to expose pits and crevasses of no known bottom whose black waters no man willingly explores. Places there are where the entire barrier takes concave shape, falling inward so that, if one has come to the outer fringes, he stands upon a crust which overhangs an unsounded abyss. Understandably, such configurations cause fierce down-sucking undertows and few have been those drawn beneath the dark projecting roof who managed to fight their way up and out again. Sobering, too, is the thought that these are the haunts of the great sea bass, the only denizen of the deep capable, and right willing, to swallow a helpless swimmer whole.

Doubtless these considerations, equally with his desire not to frighten his intended prey, caused Tavae to pick a careful path. Yet care is hard come by when the road cannot be seen. The pulverized, half-spent waves which rushed about his legs were clouded white and green, and it was by feel alone that he sought for stable footing. Twice, while Titi and I held our breaths, he staggered, once when the waters suddenly swirled higher than his waist, and again when a jutting ledge of coral which he gingerly tested crumbled beneath his weight. But he continued to move forward, still crouching as if it were wild game he stalked rather than three shining and apparently blithely unconcerned fish, and it was not until he had come to a precarious spot perilously near where the seas first broke that he came to a halt. There for long minutes he remained, braced against the sweeping ebb and flow. Across a five-foot water gap before him a last coral-head occasionally showed above the foam and I soon realized, with a mounting disquiet, that it was upon this final stepping-stone to the broad Pacific that Tavae's calculating eyes were fixed.

"He should go no farther," I said aloud.

"Eaha?" said Titi, but I saw she did not smile nor look away from her young countryman and when I turned back Tavae was in midair.

Seizing that quickly flown instant when the waters about him came to unstable rest, he gained the forward outpost, descending cat-like and ready-braced to meet the backwash which soon raced after him. Immediately a fresh comber sprang up and moved toward us with majestic, unhurried grace. Suddenly, at the halfway point as always before, the three glittering joyriders appeared within their crystal palace.

"Now, Tavae, now!" I called but he, unheeding, waited; waited crouching till the green wall curled above him, till its base tripped upon the isolated coral pedestal on which he stood and, throughout its entire arcing length, leaned steeply for ward. Only then did his arm sweep out and loose the long thin shaft, only then - as if the movement were but a continuation of the first - did he fling his body back. His skill and agility were great but not enough. Neither enough to impale his quarry nor to save himself. Parrot fish can never have been named for birds because of color alone; with the speed of flight; they were gone and the spear pierced an untenanted, empty wave. But it was a wave whose movement was no longer leisurely, and it whipped in angrily to crash on Tavae and bury him from sight.

With a cry Titi was after him, skipping nimbly over the treacherous coral, then forcing her slim body through the riled waters to the place where he had fallen. She pulled him, half-dazed, to his feet and with his arm heavy upon her shoulder, led him back to safety. Even before they reached me I saw that Tavae limped badly and that his face was distorted with pain.

"C'est rien, Monsieur Beel," he said between set teeth and with an attempt to smile. "It is nothing and I am a big crazy one. Parrot fish - they are tupapaus. It is only their shadows that we see."

"But what have you done?" I asked anxiously, bending, as did Titi, to his leg.

"Again," he said wryly, "I am the big fool. I have walked on a porcupine." He lifted his foot and showed a heel from which innumerable spines of glossy black protruded.

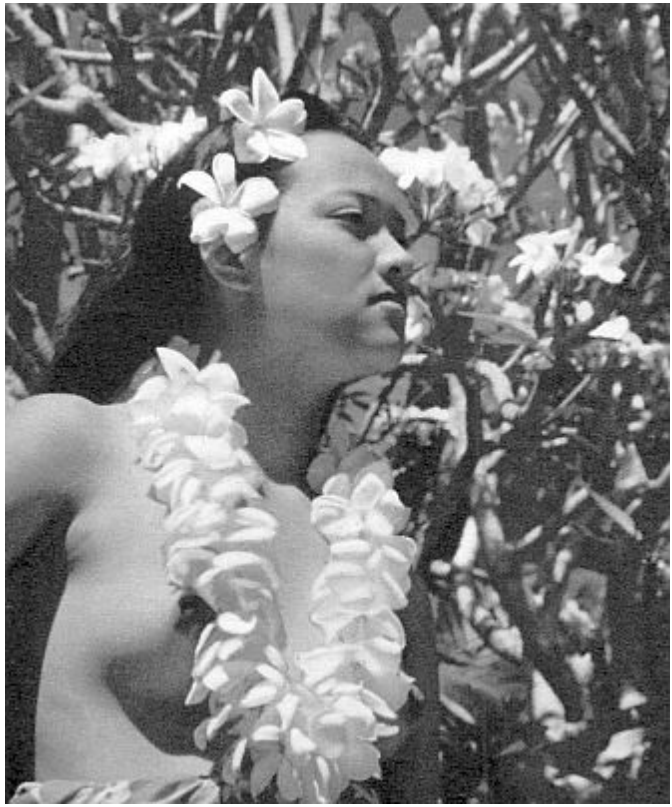
"Aue!" Titi moaned and with deft, strong fingers she began to pluck out the villainous poisoned barbs.

That Tavae suffered it was clear to see, and since then I have several times myself experienced the hot, nerve-searing pain which even the slightest contact with a vana's protective armament may bring.

Teuru had evidently watched Tavae's performance from shore and then hastened out to us in her canoe. Now she nosed the craft against the reef. "Have I not told you his head is soft?" she asked complacently. "It is like a breadfruit which has spoiled."

Her brother grinned sheepishly, then went limping to gather up three fair-sized yellow-tail, the total of his catch. Teuru's method of fishing, I saw, though perhaps less novel, had produced better results: her frond basket was filled to the brim.

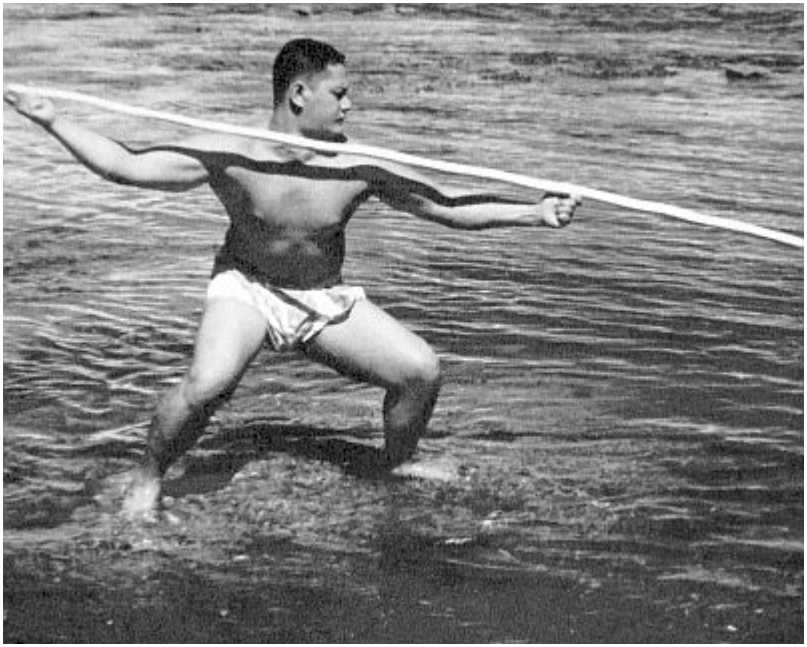
We got into the canoe and started back for Haapu.



*Fragipani lies cooly on a dusky skin.*

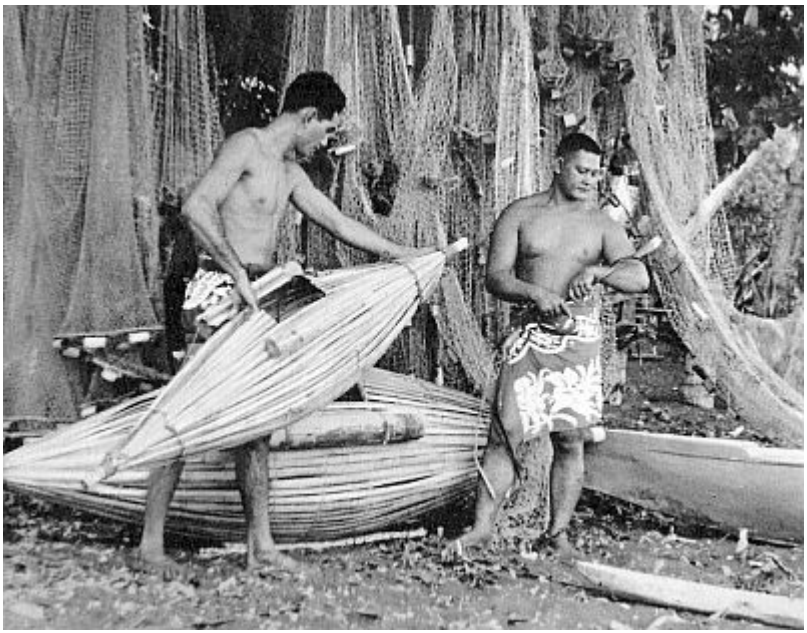
*Time for refreshment.*

*Study in spheres.*

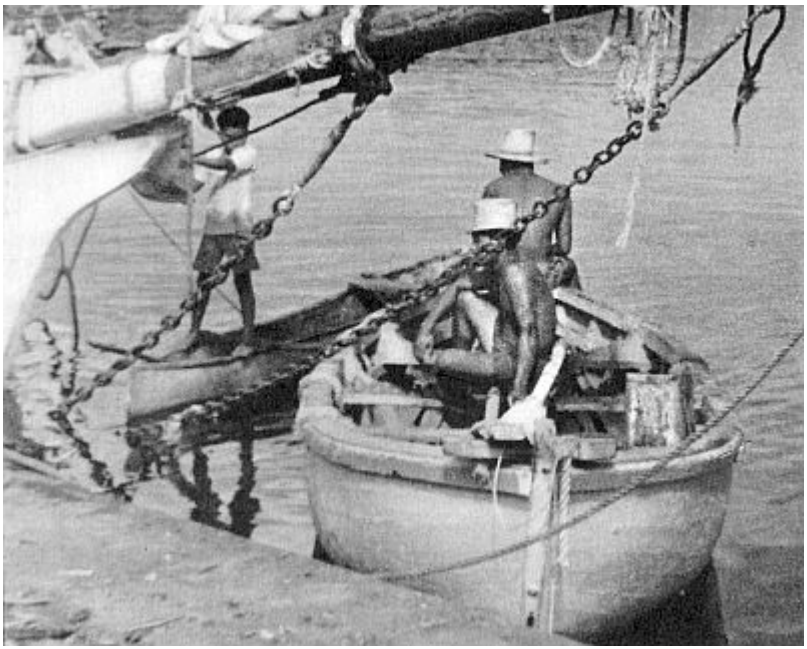


*Posied with a five-pronged spear.*

*There is little waiting for the fish to bite.*

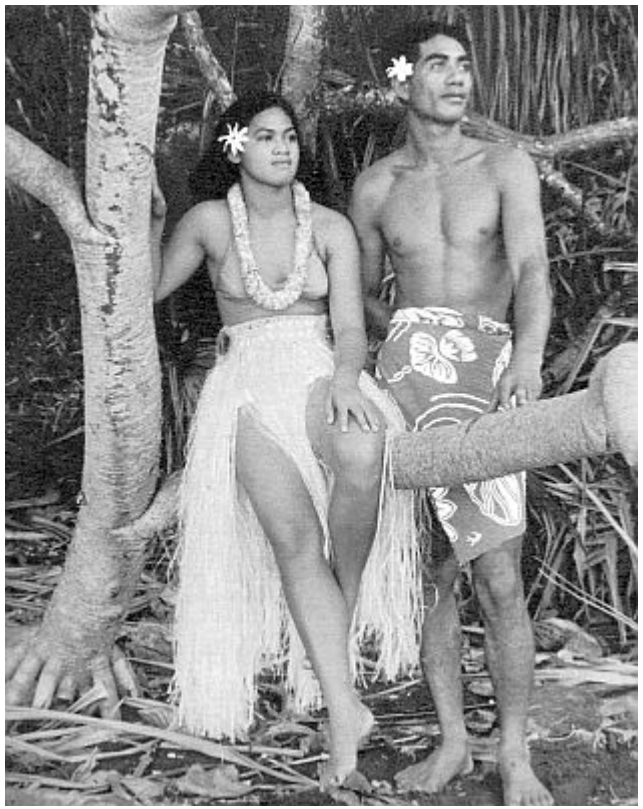


*Elliptical baskets of bamboo for underwater fish storage.*

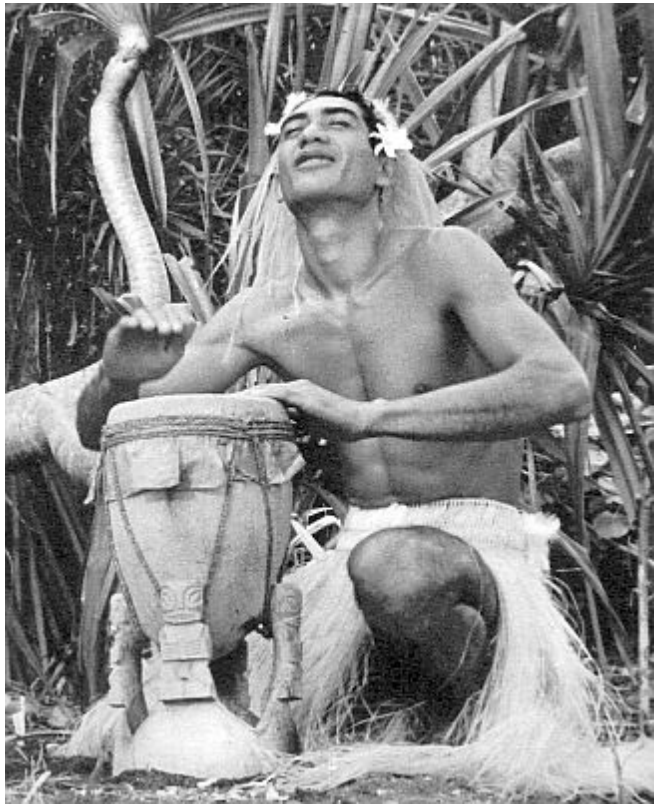


*Stevedores await the arrival of another copra-laden schooner.*

*At night his spear is guided by a torch of fronds.*

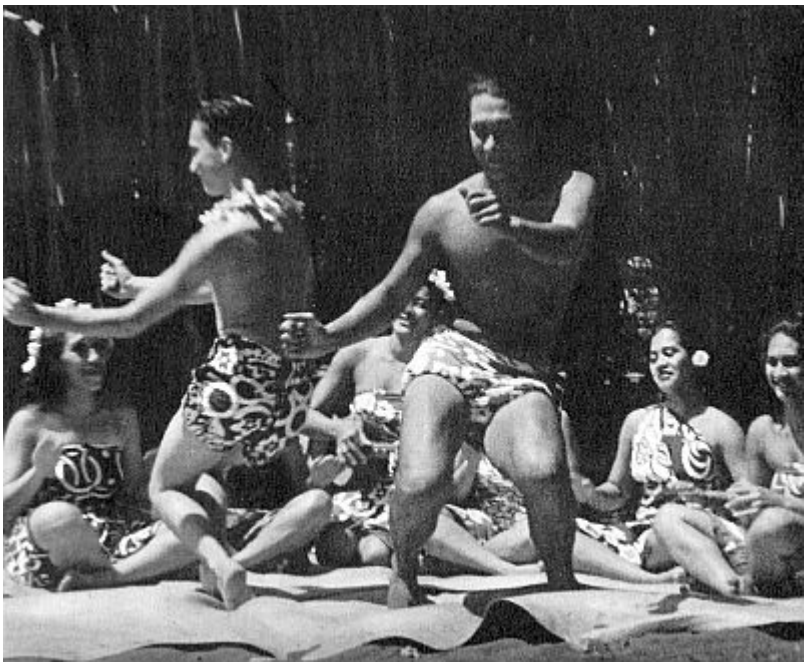


*Tane and Vahine.*



*Rhythm for the dance.*

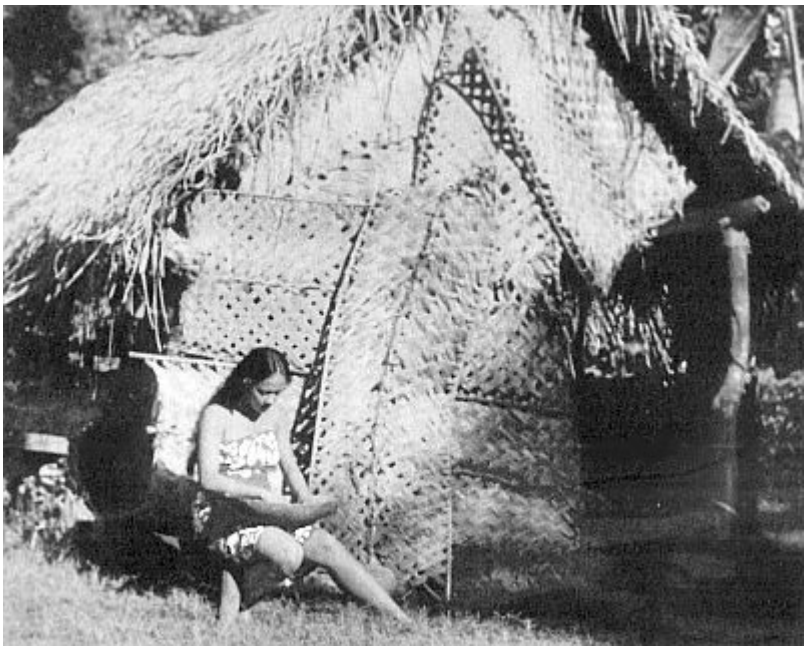
*Invitation to the dance.*



*Clap hands, slap your thighs, twang the old guitar!*

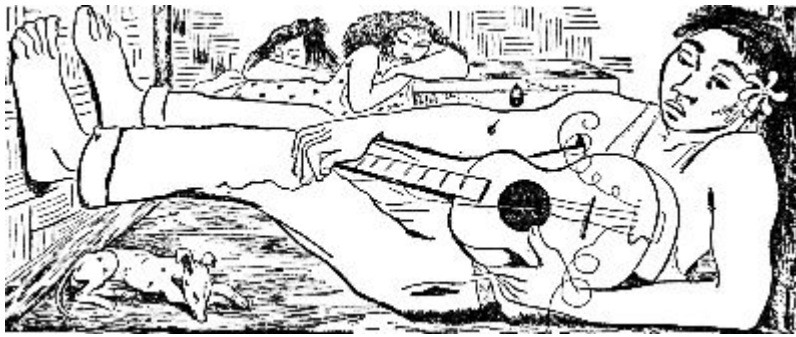
*The ori-Tahiti is a dance of love and laughter.*

*Before going in the native oven, food is wrapped in leaves.*



*Three years is the life of a hut of fronds.*

*Carvings - a tiki and a bowl.*



## XXII. *At Mama Ruau's Are Pictures*

I DO NOT today recall whether it was during my third or fourth visit to Huahine that Mama Ruau made the remark. In any case I had by that time gained sufficient command of the language to permit me to speak, however incorrectly, with considerable fluency and was no longer obliged to sit in amiable silence while village females discussed the color of my eyes or skin or the peculiarities of my character. It was a great relief to be able to do some discussing on my own account. And it was wonderful pleasure to be able to derive meaning from Mama Ruau's soft syllables, to have her remarks come to me directly rather than being relayed - none too accurately, often as not - by her son or daughter.

We were seated on the grass before her home in the late afternoon when she turned to me and with calm deliberation said, "Viriamu, you should build a house and build it close to ours."

I am sure she had never found it in any way remarkable or strange that a foreigner should enjoy her village or her people. Nothing, she unquestionably felt, could be more natural. Even, I suspect, she may have wondered why, upon occasion, I went away and allowed months to pass before I next returned. Of course, although she had never laid eyes upon it, and had no faintest desire or expectation of doing so, she had heard all there is to tell of the island capital, Papeete. It was to this port she understood that I, together with her two youngest children, sailed. Off there somewhere, probably in the same general vicinity, were those other much talked-of villages, Paris and San Francisco. That also she knew and could, if called upon, go so far as to pronounce the name of the first if not the second. But what, she sometimes wondered, could one go seeking in those places that did not exist as well on the bit of ground called Haapu? It was impossible to explain, and I think my own periodic departures for the teeming cities (such is even Papeete in comparison with Haapu) were made chiefly that I might all the more gratefully return. And if today I go less frequently to Huahine it is largely due

to the sadness which meets me there now that Mama Ruau has herself departed on a journey from which she is not expected back.

Certainly it never entered her head that I would demur to her so sensible suggestion and, in truth, it never entered mine. "The land," she continued practically, "which lies there just across the lane is ours to use and live upon. Let the house stand at the water's edge watching the lagoon on the one hand and this dwelling beside which we are seated on the other. Let it be a wide thing and a long thing, and tall as well, in order that many people may come beneath the roof, for already you have seen that my home often cannot contain the number who would enter."

That there was indeed much to be said for the wisdom of constructing a separate roof for the popaa I could not deny. Through no merit of my own, through no other circumstance than that of being a white man with a certain number of a white man's trappings, I was often the involuntary cause of sudden assemblages which not only overtaxed the hospitality of Mama Ruau's house but sometimes threatened it with disaster. Only the evening before there had been an unfortunate occurrence, the blame for which I prefer to place upon *Life* magazine.

It was the hour when the lamps are lighted and already a feeble flame glowed in the little hurricane lantern which, from sundown to the next sunrise, was always at Mama's side. Only our immediate family were gathered there. Titi was seated in the doorway which the fading day still faintly framed, her feet on the step without, her back resting against a pillar-the perfect picture of beautiful repose. Teuru, having returned after the rest of us had supped (all day she had planted vanilla in the hills), bent over a bowl of fermented coconut sauce in which she dipped morsels of cold boiled fish before transferring them, with loud sucking sounds, to her mouth. Tavae was extended at full length upon the still warm boards of the floor. On his stomach was balanced the tamanu wood guitar and, with eyes fixed unseeingly on the darkening roof peak, he brushed blunt fingers softly on the strings. For hours on end he might remain so, in a son of sweet hypnosis induced by the quick, light strumming and enjoying, I suspect, a pleasant vacuity of mind which rivaled Titi's own. The moments are few in Haapu when the air is not gently aquiver with the mellow cadence of a guitar, and if it did not have its source beneath our own roof, then it was from another not far away. During the days, when the wind and seas raise their competing voices, it is perhaps less noticeable, but when evening comes and the elements, the birds and children slumber, this sound which has existed all along, which is a son of ever-present village breathing, lifts its rhythmic pulse and calls, still quietly, for attention. I should not have been surprised, then, to have had Tavae's music go on and on till at last, as often before, it lulled me into peaceful sleep. And so it might have done but for a slight deviation in the pattern of my behavior which I presently chanced to make.

While others occupied themselves as they pleased or, like Titi, in passive

vegetation, I had fallen into the habit of spending an hour or two with a book. Seeing that the time for this ritual had arrived, Mama Ruau addressed her daughter. "Teuru," said she, "finish your fish and put fire in the popaa's lamp."

This Teuru did. She produced the tall, glass-stemmed lamp from the corner where it was kept for my especial use, gave a polish to the chimney with an end of her pareu, lighted and placed it upon a packing case beside me. Thinking to be particularly helpful, she then brought me the book she had seen in my hands the night before.

"Thanks," I said, "I've done with that; I'll get something else," and I rose to do so.

"But what is the matter with this?" she asked with a look of disappointment. "See, it is not even worn."

We had gone over this ground several times before but Teuru is not quick to learn in such matters; she is also a trifle stubborn when it comes to letting go of an idea comfortably held for a long while - a tendency which does not, admittedly, make her in any way unique. In all the years that have passed since their first contact with other races the Tahitian people have possessed a single book and that one is, of course, the Bible. They are very fond and proud of it and I know from personal observation that Teuru has herself worn out two rather flimsily bound copies. Those self-taught ones who can, like her, by dint of elaborate lip movements decipher a hundred words in an hour's time are often seen with noses close to the microscopic print. So also, which has always struck me as more mysterious, with the completely unlettered to whom the characters must have the significance - but not, one would think, the entertaining diversity - of fly tracks. Yet they, too, are frequently, fascinatedly lost in the pages of the strange thing of paper and ink which holds imprisoned their own dulcet language. Not once, however, has it occurred to either group of readers to wish for a second book and, although she has finally ceased to speak of it, Teuru is even today unreconciled to the number of superfluous volumes which line my Tahiti home and manifests her continuing disapproval by the patronizing and slightly impatient manner in which she dusts the unnecessary things, haphazardly replacing them upside down or with bindings to the wall as if in doing it at all she but indulges a small boy's incomprehensible whim. On the evening of which I am speaking we were still trying, with true missionary zeal, to convert each other.

"Why, just look, Monsieur Beel, the front is on and the back is on and no page is torn or even soiled. It is like new; it is as good as when it first grew over there in America. It is good as it ever was."

"It was never very good, Teuru."

"How can you say so? It is pretty and fat and has a nice yellow color."

"A horrible color."

"You don't like it? Well, I will get you the brown one I saw in your box."

"No, no. Never mind."

"What's the matter? Don't you like brown either?"

"Color has nothing to do with it."

"Then why do you refuse this one because it is a very pretty yellow?"

"Aue!"

"I don't see why you want to groan."

"Teuru," said Mama Ruau, "do not annoy the popaa."

"But he is playing foolish."

"And why should he not?" the old woman inquired equably. "A little foolishness now and then is good."

With her head cocked to one side and eyes fixed on Tavae's spreading toes which wagged in time to his music, Teuru weighed for a full minute her mother's words and then, having as usual found them wise, she smiled. "All right," she conceded generously, "be as silly as you please."

On my inter-island jaunts I carried my belongings in a light wooden chest such as the natives use and, walking to it, I gave an unnecessarily vigorous twist to the key and set raucously jangling the little bells in the lock. I flipped up the lid and then - perhaps out of sheer perversity, or perhaps from a sudden distaste for literature brought on by our bookish discussion - reached, not for a novel as I'd originally intended, but for a bundle of *Lifes* which had come by the last mail ship. Not strictly a silly act, it seems to me, but (as events soon proved) one most ill-advised. I carried the material to the packing case on which the lamp now brightly burned - brightly, at least, in comparison with Mama's lantern - and, seated tailorwise upon the floor, began to strip off the outside wrappers. No sooner was the first magazine uncovered than Tavae, who had raised his head sufficiently to see what was afoot, ceased his strumming.

Letting the guitar clatter from his stomach, he slid over be side me. "Pictures!" he exclaimed delightedly.

"Pictures?" Teuru hesitated a brief instant, as if debating the advisability of giving her approval to a new foolishness, and then came quickly near.

Mama Ruau's eyebrows rose interestedly. "Eaha teie?" she asked, "What have we here?"

"Hohoa, Mama," Teuru replied from where she bent over her brother's shoulder.

"Ah!" Promptly the old mother drew her mat over to the circle of lamplight.

Even Titi, who had been dreamily regarding the now darkened village street in which nothing whatever was happening, turned and looked inside, then got up and joined us. If it had stopped there we might, all five, have spent a pleasant and sociable evening quite unmarred by tragedy of any sort. But someone, and I am sure it must have been Toma, the chiefs overgrown, none-too-bright son, was standing in the dark outside with his eye glued to a chink in one of the bamboo walls.

Of course, if anything of interest is happening within a dwelling, especially if it be a scène de ménage, anyone and everyone will gladly take up

such a post if there is too large a crowd about the open door. Needless to say, Haapu boasts no cinema, and I pray that it never shall, but these small, spontaneously arising dramas are far more diverting than any film of celluloid. Furthermore, nothing is required to gain admission but legs fleet enough to carry one to the house suddenly become a stage before it is surrounded in entirety and no peep hole left unoccupied. Even a late arrival may sit upon the grass, listening to the spirited verbal interchange within and gather besides, from the running commentaries of those more fortunately placed, something of the action.

"Just look at that, she is biting his ear."

"So she is! Chew it well, Horu!"

"Now he has a fistful of her hair."

"Hang on, Tu, hang on mightily!"

No one pays particular attention to children during these impromptu theatricals and they are left to fend for themselves, which they are perfectly capable of doing. They burrow energetically between the legs of their elders to gain ringside stations; they clamber in the limbs of pandanus or purau trees which may overlook the door, and shinny up the walls to hang beneath the eaves.

"Aue, aue, he has tom off her pareu!"

"Piripo tona?" a distant listener inquires.

"No, no pants at all."

If the play shows signs of being protracted it is very likely that Ah Moy, the village Chinaman, will arrive with a large tray of sweets, thus adding to the carnival spirit and to his collection of small change. As a general rule, however, the denouement is speedily reached and before he has had time to set up shop the people are drifting home, supplied with a subject of conversation for the rest of the day or night. One gains, by regular attendance at such presentations, the ability to gauge and to foresee the culmination, for the pattern is always pleasingly and classically the same. The heated dialogue of the participants, rich with telling epithets, mounts in steady crescendo till, in electrifying climax, the most terrible of all insults is hurled lustily back and forth.

"Puaa!"

"You, too, are a pig!"

"Puaa neoneo!"

"Smelly pig yourself!"

Blows, or the precipitate flight of the defeated, are then sure immediately to follow and the curtain soon descends.

I would not wish by this recital to leave the impression of an habitually quarrelsome folk, for the inhabitants of Haapu, and Tahitians as a whole, are distinctly otherwise and the brief squalls which occasionally blow up serve happily to guard against monotony. Their passing would indubitably be still more rapid were it not for the fact that, once successfully begun, a certain

obligation rests upon the actors not to disappoint an expectant and appreciative audience. Tu may eventually have lost the contest and have been driven from his house to find shelter with a neighbor, a cousin or an aunt. Yet if one should pass his house on the next day, chances are that he might be seen outstretched with his head in his wife's ample lap while with affectionate fingers she searches through his dark hair for a stray louse or two.

I was, however, speaking of the great bag of unnecessary flesh which was the chief's son. Toma it must have been who heard the magic word "pictures," because no one else would have been so stupid as to be looking through the bamboo into a house where nothing was going on. Evidently, impelled by some vague sense of filial duty, it was his father to whom he first passed the news, because Marii arrived at our door before all others. But that the boy had not been content with a single errand was soon clear, and I can see him stopping at every house up and down the length of the village, putting his brown moon-face in the door and announcing, "At Mama Ruau's are pictures!"

A steady stream of guests was soon mounting the three coconut-log steps and dropping down beside us to join in fascinated inspection of the magazines. It became necessary to move the packing case into the middle of the room and to turn the lamp wick as high as it would go. From this focal point the ever growing company spread out in concentric rings like some heathen sect densely gathered about the central flame of a potent shrine. And here, in truth, was worship of a sort: not of fire, but of pictures. The half dozen *Lifes* which I had received were spread flat upon the floor immediately below the light and over each one bent, temple to temple, the eager heads. Mama Ruau and the chief, because of the respect properly due their age and rank, and I myself, being a creature of a queer and different sort, continued to enjoy barely enough room to breathe, but the rest, as the floor continued to shake beneath the tread of new arrivals, were soon lying cheek to cheek and rump to rump in rows two and three layers deep. Naturally, the inevitable happened.

Someone, overcome no doubt by the novelty of the show, forgetting the habit and the warnings of years, stepped upon and crashed loudly through the strip of planking which, since Teuru's girlhood, had been unsound. A faint frown crossed Mama Ruau's features but she said nothing. The chief, however, tardily raised his head from his magazine and looked around. "Enough!" he proclaimed. "The house is full."

"Full" was a pitifully inadequate word to describe the condition of Mama's little dwelling. The walls, those soft, lovely, pliable walls laced from an infinite number of grass-thin lengths of flexible bamboo, bulged outward, taut, creaking, straining, giving to the entire structure the appearance of a dangerously distended balloon which the addition of one more breath of air, of one more broad-beamed picture-gazer, would cause to fly apart. There was a constant shuddering of the thatch overhead which sent small showers of frond particles fluttering down upon us like brittle, dry-brown snowflakes. But

what, to me, seemed most alarming was the slow yet definitely perceptible weaving of the stilt-supported floor, a motion vaguely and disquietingly reminiscent of that which a boat assumes when it is so overloaded that its center of gravity has gone to some place where it has no business to be and which natural law will soon correct by abruptly turning turtle. Not that a literal capsizing appeared likely; more probably, I imagined, the demented teetering of the house which I recalled a single sow to have once set all a-tremble would end in a sudden splintering crash to the ground three feet below. Yet a study of the dark faces there congregated revealed no sign of concern on anyone and, as time passed uneventful, my apprehensions gradually gave way to a lulled sense of sweet repose wherein I took actual pleasure from our swaying and discovered that it was only necessary to close the eyes in order to think oneself afloat upon a raft beneath which passed the sea's slow billows, or aloft in a tree-house which a soft wind gently rocked. So, although I was distressed by the damage already done, I managed to put aside the idea of complete collapse, and if further assurance were needed it was supplied by two youths who, in jack-in-the-box fashion, immediately sprang up to fill the gap where our decking had given way. Nothing was to be seen of their feet and legs firmly planted on the underlying sand, but their finely modeled torsos, neatly severed just below the shadowed pits of their navels, rose into the house like twin sculptures of earthy brown. Clearly, their position was such that should my initial fears have had foundation their appearance of half-men would speedily have become fact. This I supposed they surely realized and their placid, untroubled expressions caused me to turn with a mind at rest to the chief who, by coughings and throat-clearings, had for some while been trying to attract my attention.

"What, Viriamu," he demanded, placing a finger upon the open page before him, "what is this creature that breathes smoke?"

It was an innocent enough, perfectly natural question and should have had no repercussions. At least half a dozen of the magazines were spread round the inner circle. Mama Ruau her self presided over one, turning the pages with methodical and earnest regularity. Tavae and Teuru directed perusal of a second and a third. Titi, rather surprisingly, was deeply engrossed in a fourth over whose photographs she lingered with an air of bemused fascination; her luminous eyes reflected bits of the lamp flame as I had seen them do before, but now they seemed to flash sparks of animation, even of intelligence, and it was with a faint sense of disappointment that I discovered her copy of *Life* to be upside down. The load throughout the house had been fairly well distributed, and so it might have remained if the chief had not spoken. But at his words everyone forgot the picture over which he was individually puzzling and, with a determined wriggling and pushing, sought to share with Marii his smoke-belching locomotive. Possibly even this mass shifting of ballast could have been absorbed by Mama's remarkably resilient dwelling if it had not been for the chief's son who, hearing his father's voice, made a

sudden effort to enter the house which he had witlessly filled only to find himself, tardily arrived, excluded. Who shall guess how many kilos of fat Toma's frame supports? It must approach that of a well-stuffed copra sack of the larger size, which his general dimensions much resemble. At any rate all there was of him loomed over the heads of those in the doorway as he pawed his way in.

The result was not at all what I had expected. There was no sudden splintering, no crashing, no rending of beams and rafters. Instead, Mama Ruau's house bowed to fate, and to Toma's senseless weight, with a leisurely grace befitting the country of its origin and the dignity of its owner. Very deliberately it tilted inland, dipping slowly its prim, high-peaked roof and raising at the same time its seaward skirts as if performing a grave courtesy. So measured was its resigned subsidence that when that side of the house beneath which the tired stilts had wilted made final contact with the earth it was with a barely perceptible jar. No one had been seriously inconvenienced. The two torsos had had ample time to gather up their legs and hoist themselves inside; Mama Ruau, always thoughtful, was unhurried when she lifted the lamp from the packing case. But polite and gentle as the fare's obeisance was, the floor took such a slant that all of us began a descent across the smooth-worn boards toward the lee scuppers. However, not even this concerted migration was in any degree precipitate: rather it was with something approaching majesty that we progressed upon our rears. There was no confusion, no outcry. The chief retreated, still holding in his hands the magazine which was the cause of the whole sad affair, while Mama Ruau, floating amid the folds of her outspread mother hubbard, advanced resolutely after him bearing aloft the lamp like a torch of liberty in her right hand and showing, by the expression of utter imperturbability on her aged face, a fine contempt for mere physical misfortune.

When we had come to rest Marii looked to his son who was lying, an amorphous heap, in one corner. "Toma," he said sternly, "leave the house."

This Toma obediently did. He struggled to his feet and got himself out of the leaning doorway, but if the chief imagined that, relieved of his offspring's disgraceful bulk, the structure would right itself, he was mistaken. Others followed and soon Mama Ruau, Marii and I alone remained. I had myself starred to rise when the chief put a detaining hand upon my shoulder.

"Say, Viriamu," he admonished. "Do not be disturbed."

Not quite understanding, I nevertheless relapsed in my place and had hardly done so when, accompanied by much scuffing from below where a score of bucks had their broad backs against the joists, we commenced all three uncertainly to mount again. Soon we rode once more upon an even keel and I could hear the forked stilts being wedged under the cross beams and the earth tamped down around their butts. Mama Ruau restored the lamp to its station on the packing case and Marii put the *Life* down beside it.

"This beast that sends smoke from its lungs," he demanded. "Where does

it live?"

Remembrance of the incident just described was still vivid on the morrow when Teuru's mother made her generous offer of a piece of land on which to built a thatch house of my own. It impelled me promptly, gratefully, to accept and dictated to a certain extent the words of my little speech of appreciation.

"Mauruuru roa," I said, "many, many thanks. It will bring me great happiness to have a home in Haapu. I shall be proud when men come from other villages and, seeing it, inquire, 'To whom is it?' and are answered, 'To Viriamu.' You are kind to permit me to place it there by the sea where it may overlook the lagoon on the one side and this house of yours, so often overburdened, upon the other. I should like it to be as you have said: a thing wide, long and tall-but also, Mama Ruau, I think the stilts beneath should be very great in number."

## XXIII. *Incidentally, a House Is Built*

WHEN, like some riotous tropic plant, my Huahine house sprouted up beside the bay, I had no idea its life was to be so short. But I wonder if ever a man found satisfaction more complete in his shelter from the sun and rains than did I for two brief years in the house-of-fronds that Tavae's uncle, Natua, planned for me.

Natua built well, and as solidly as his light materials permitted. He posited the whole upon stout pilings driven deep into the gently sloping shore. That a small, forlorn forest of stilts is all that now remains, and that the structure which sat upon them was blown away to sea, is not his fault. The wind which rose in a January night still to come was such as is seen no more than once in a quarter century. Yet though the rows of lagoon-lapped pillars now stand in silent reproach as if demanding again the privilege of upholding a life-filled habitation, though many a villager has tactfully, hopefully suggested it, I have not built a second time. It could never be the same. The happiness on which, before its separate fronds were scattered, the friendly roof looked down is not to be recaptured. Numbers of those who sat beneath it, and among them the best beloved of all, are gone. But through the twice repeated seasons which it weathered, how many festive gatherings the shading thatch witnessed; how much of music, of laughter and companionable conversation its slowly browning, drying leaves absorbed.

Natua was jovial, heavy-set, middle-aged, with close cropped graying hair and bronzed arms the size of my own thighs. When we met by the shore in the early morning, he wrapped both arms about me and compressed them affectionately. "Viriamu," he said, "this is a good thing you do. Every man requires a house, a woman or two, and children in plenty. It is proper that the house should come first." Releasing me, he stooped to gather a bunch of small sticks in one hand and a small stone in the other, then waded into the shallows. "Now, where would you have it begin? About here?"

I glanced back to see that we were more or less in line with Mama Ruau's, and nodded agreement. Natua drove a stake into the water. He took several

strides parallel to the shore and drove another. So he continued till eight markers grew from the lagoon. The seaward extremity of the wide veranda had been established. It was simple as that. Nor was any other stage of construction greatly more complex.

In all, when he was done with the preliminary layout, Natua had planted a grove of twenty-four stakes in six fairly straight rows, thus showing where the pilings were to go. He then went to the old purau tree which grew where it would spread cooly over the ridgepole, seated himself beneath it and remarked, "Nothing in the village, except the sing-house, will be larger."

That it was destined not only to approach the fare-himene in size but to rival as well its public nature, I had no way then of knowing. If, however, I had been able to foresee that it would be so, it would have been no disappointment. Rather, the prospect would have been all the more entrancing for, most fortunately, it was never a hermit's life that I sought in Haapu.

Tavae had appeared beside us. "Uhu!" he exclaimed in pleased surprise as his eye fell on Natua's handiwork. "This will be a fare to cause talk in other villages." He squatted between the older man and myself. "What will be required for its making?"

Natua folded his massive arms over his chest and allowed his lower lip to envelop the upper. For some moments he gazed thoughtfully into the branches of the purau overhead. "It is always better," he stated at last, "to have too much material than too little."

"True," said Tavae. "This is to be the living-place of our dear friend. Let us therefore take care that it is not built with sagging bellies and long faces."

"Indeed no," Natua agreed. "We must not so invite sadness to enter and forever dwell within."

"Is there danger of that?" I inquired, for this was a hazard with which I had not been confronted when building in Tahiti.

Without my having noticed her approach, Mama Ruau had come on quiet bare feet and now joined us in the comfortable shade. "Perhaps it is not so in your country, Viriamu," she conceded, making answer for her brother, "and perhaps it is no longer so in islands where Tahitians have flung away the wisdom of their fathers. But here, it is as Natua says. Here we continue to remember the things that our ancestors learned. Whether these things may be truths for your people, I do not know; they are such for mine. And this is one of them. Through all the days of its usefulness, a dwelling in Haapu will reflect the moods in which it first was made. Let there be anger or discontent or sorrow among those who build, and the thatching of the roof, the interwoven bamboos of the walls will fall in a pattern of unhappiness. There will be a coldness in the house, and it will touch each one who steps inside. Are there not houses of this sort in your own land, houses that breathe an unfriendly air, that fail to warm the heart, that hold no welcome?"

"Yes, Mama Ruau," I admitted, "there are."

"Then tell me, Viriamu. What was wrong? Was it the stuffs of which they

were made?"

"That can hardly be, for all are made of much the same things."

The old woman smiled slowly, contentedly. "Then I suspect that this particular truth is not confined to Huahine. In all cases of discontented homes the trouble surely lies in spirits of those who conceived and raised them. There must be joy in the making if it is to continue to fill the finished fare. All who take part in the building - and there is none in the village able to walk who will not have his share - all must be gay. In this way your fare will rise, not an empty husk without feeling or meaning, but a home for living in which the songs and pleasures that go to create it will forever be renewed."

Others had been gathering while Mama Ruau spoke, and as she finished I looked up to discover that a large part of the village was already assembled beneath the generously spreading tree. Marii and a number of the most responsible elders carried axes on their shoulders. Over the arms of Titi and other young girls were green, freshly plaited palm baskets. Teuru and her contemporaries had sharpened bush knives in their hands and most had, as well, babes upon their hips. Youths of Tavae's age stood with paddles planted in the ground beside them. Children, the small and less small, the naked and less naked, gamboled on the outskirts of the old purau where the sun shone down, and one, bolder and more imaginative than the rest, penetrated our inner circle towing a flying wasp on a thread behind him. He came to a stop between the chief's outspread legs where he peered at us intently with wide round eyes. Marii slipped a hand behind the child's head, impelled him gently forward, and started slightly when he observed the captive wasp sail through his crotch. Then he cleared his throat.

"People of Haapu," he said, striving hard to raise his voice, "Viriamu's house is to be large; many hands are necessary, and many hands have come. No one shall be disappointed, for there is much to do."

There were cries of approval. "Mea maitai roa! Tera te maa!"

We who sat at the base of the tree were surrounded by figures clad in pareus of all the standard colors-white and red, blue and yellow, yellow and red, brown and white. I looked into the faces, some golden skinned, some of an intermediate shade of brown, some clear, sun-darkened mahogany, all shining with eager expectancy. And in that minute it dawned upon me that it was to no dull chore we were moving but to a festival.

Again, with greater effort than before, Marii cleared his throat. For a moment his voice gained a trace of its old resonance. "The days that follow will be glad ones, and for this happiness we have Viriamu to thank. Now, because Teuru and Tavae are managers of his affairs, let them decide who shall accomplish what."

Tavae did not reply immediately and, turning to him, I saw that his eyes were on Titi who stood with her usual languid grace among the girls. There was a dreamy expression on his handsome face, an expression which Teuru, also, must have remarked, because she spoke a little sharply.

"The day has only begun, and my brother sleeps. But let Natua first tell us what is needed for the popaa's house. Then perhaps Tavae will gather his wits so that we may divide the doing."

Natua unfolded his arms, removed his back from the trunk of the tree and leaned forward. "Very well, Teuru. I have been thinking, and now I am ready to let it be known. We must make provision for three days."

"You expect to build in three days?" I asked incredulously.

"No, no, Viriamu. That will be done in a single one. But during the two following, the fare will be taught the scent of our breaths, the sound of our voices, and the shape of our ways. Is that clear? Good. Then I shall speak of the materials required for your house in the order of their importance."

"First the pia anani - the orange beer."

"Perhaps Marii will take charge of the beer,"Tavae suggested.

"I suppose," the chief hazarded with a glance at me, "there are nowhere a few demijohns of ava?"

"No," I said firmly, "there is no rum." (Ever since I had discovered it was fact, and not Tavae's imagination, that the chief's vocal chords were giving out, there had been no more rum.)

"Pia anani will be easier on your throat, Marii," Tavai comforted.

"You do not need to tell me that," said Marii sternly. "We all know it is the knees that our beer attacks."

"Of course." Tavae turned to Titi and the group of girls surrounding her. "Titi," he said, "take your friends to the mountains, pile your baskets high with oranges and carry them back to Marii who will direct the squeezing of them in the gasoline tins. Do this many times so that the oranges may no longer be counted, and so that no one will have to consider whether he should fill his glass again,"

"Next," Natua proclaimed, "let us have three boars and at least a dozen little pigs."

"Those will be given by our family," said Teuru. "And since you have yourself the most skill, Natua, do you attend to their slaughter and cleaning in the lagoon."

"I will do it," her uncle agreed, "but I must have an assistant."

"Toma will lend you his weight for sitting upon the pigs to keep them still, and he will also hold their mouths firmly shut while you slip the knife into their throats."

"Good. Then we come to the matter of food from the sea. Of every sort there should be a quantity."

"Leave that to me," said Tavae confidently. "The bamboo fish-cages will be anchored the whole length of the village, and each one we shall fill - with ature, ohopu, tarau and whatever else comes to our nets and spears."

We had begun the morning in a uniformly cheerful frame of mind, but as Natua's enumeration of the things required for house-making continued our spirits expanded still more, and by the time he had come to the end of his

careful cataloging of every edible thing our island afforded we were smiling and chuckling and giving each other congratulatory back-slaps, all in a warm aura of delighted anticipation.

"Taata Haapu," said the chief, when each one of us had been assigned his duty, "the weather is warm. The beer will work quickly. In three days it will be ready for drinking and for continued working in each man's opu. Everything must be assembled by the morning of the fourth day. Let us go and begin."

The gathering broke up, some making for their canoes, some setting out along the river trail, others heading for the mountains. I, too, had risen and, having been detailed to the fishing fleet, was about to join Tavae at the shore.

Teuru's mother was close beside me. "Manuia, Viriamu that you have good luck."

"Thanks, Mama Ruau," I said, "many thanks." Then a disconcerting idea entered my mind. "Has nothing been forgotten, Old Mother?"

"Forgotten?"

"The fare. Is the fare to be made of breadfruit and taro and pia?"

Her low laugh invited one to join in it, and I did so. But I still wanted to know. "What about the niau for the roof, and the aito wood for rafters, and the purau for posts? Natua said nothing of these."

She put a reassuring hand on mine. "All that will be brought together, too. From the stakes Natua placed in the shallows and on the shore it may easily be guessed what is needed. Perhaps a thousand and five hundred coco fronds, a hundred straight lengths of aito. And so on. But you see, Viriamu, there is no especial pleasure to be had in speaking of such things. They do not make the mouth water as does the thought of slowly roasted pig; they do not make the feet tingle and wish to dance as does the thought of Marii's orange brew. That is why they were not mentioned."

After taking leave of Mama Ruau I went down to the long canoe which held the great mound of the village fishing net amidships. But there, as Tavae put a paddle in my hands, still another doubt assailed me.

"What about the flooring?" I asked him. "You have told me all else is found here, but that boards must be ordered from Papeete."

"You must write a letter," he said.

"Of course. And weeks will pass before *Poti* brings the lumber."

"I know. But for what is this?" Tavae tapped his forehead significantly. "Is it not for clever thinking? Dip your paddle, Viriamu, and leave the matter of the floor to me."

Before the morning of the momentous fourth day dawned I ceased to bother about the floor, or about anything else concerning the dwelling which Mama Ruau's people had determined to raise for me. My thoughts must gradually have slid of their own accord into the same channels which those of all Haapu followed, and in consequence I came to see things in their proper

perspective. The actual, physical house that was presumably to result from so much entertaining activity would be merely a natural outcome of our combined pleasure. One's attention, as Teuru explained it, should be given wholeheartedly to the joyful business of amassing food and consuming it, of concocting drinks and downing them, composing songs, inventing dances, then voicing and performing them. All these things are embraced by the native word "arearea"and experience has shown that arearea in sufficient quantity will painlessly, and almost inevitably, deliver a fare as a sort of by product.

"But," said Teuru, attempting to reduce the whole thing to terms so simple that they might be grasped by a popaa, "it is similar to love. When a man and woman love, their thoughts are not bent on the child which happily may follow. No. They devote themselves to their pleasure, remembering only to combine it with laughter so that the babe will not be solemn faced and sad. Do you also behave in this way. Put your mind to the arearea, and let the house take care of itself."

As I re-examine this particular pronouncement of Teuru's, it seems to me to hold a good deal more of sense than does the general run of her utterances. After all, she is Mama Ruau's daughter. So it should not be cause for astonishment if, how ever unwittingly, she occasionally lets fall a little gem of wisdom of her own. Probably I shall be accused of reading far more into her words than could have been intended. But what I drew from them was this. Creation of whatever sort of houses, babes, books or paintings-should be delight. A sound enough theory it appears even now. And at the time and place of her first exposition, it had the authoritative ring of a proven way of life. I accepted it without reservation, abandoned myself exclusively to arearea, and so earned the sincere approval of Natua, the chief and many others who claimed never to have witnessed a white man less encumbered with unseemly restraint.

Titi awakened me. She did so by kneeling beside me, beating determinedly on my bare chest with her small fists, and crying, "Viriamu, Viriamu - cast away your sleep!"

The sun had still to rise and there was little light in Mama Ruau's house, yet what there was disclosed a more animated Titi than I had ever before seen upon dry land. "Thank you, Titi," I said, taking her wrists, "that will do. I am thoroughly awake."

"Then get up quickly, quickly," she urged. "Run swiftly to the stream and then put on the brightest and prettiest of your pareus."

The sight of Titi betraying something much like excitement was so novel and attractive that I deliberately lingered. She was bent low, her breathing accelerated so that her breasts rose and fell as they used to do when she burst to the lagoon's surface after a long, deep dive.

"Is there reason for hurry?"

Titi's usually immobile and always beautiful features asIsumed an

expression close to outrage. "ls there reason....! Do you forget what day is with us?"

"It is Saturday, I think."

"Aue! It is *your* day. The day of your house and our great happiness."

"Is it?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Now come. I will go with you to the river and cover you with soap."

"I can handle the soap," I said, starting at last to rise.

"Viriamu!" Surprisingly, she put a hand on my shoulder and pushed me gently back against the pandanus mat. I looked up into the darkly glowing eyes, and I gazed at the lovely face. But the eyes, the face, Titi herself had changed. No doubt it had been an orderly and gradual process, and it must have been going on right under my nose for a considerable while. Yet my recognition of the fact had had to wait for this moment. Titi had grown up. Furthermore, her speech now carried a hint of independent thought.

She was frowning faintly, and shook her head slowly from side to side. "Whenever I wish to be helpful, you refuse. You do not like me?"

"Why, of course I do - as does everyone in Haapu."

"I speak of a more impatient liking," she said and then, bend ing still lower, put her lips firmly against my own. "And that," she inquired, drawing back slightly, "you do not like . . .? You are smiling. I will do it again."

The need for hurry which at the outset had been so pressing now appeared to have lessened. When Titi had done it again she slipped back to a sitting posture, legs curled close against her, and regarded me speculatively. "I think you will no longer shame me before Mama Teuru?"

"What are you saying?"

"That the softness of your head is passing."

"If there has been softness of heads it has been with your dear Teuru's own."

"No," she protested, "Teuru's thoughts are solid and good. How should I have guessed that with some popaas a girl should move first and then continue in advance?"

"Ah," I exclaimed accusingly, propping myself on my elbows, "you have been taking instructions again."

"Is it not right to listen when a person of experience speaks? And who knows more of the ways of popaa tanes than Teuru?"

"No one," I agreed with certainty. "But it is knowledge that is of no use whatever in Haapu."

Titi removed one of the red hibiscus blossoms which were tucked into her hair above either temple and slipped it behind my ear. "You are here, Viriamu," she said, "and you are a popaa."

I sat up. "Now wait a minute, Titi.

But the new Titi was not content to wait. "Be silent for a little," she said, and placed a finger on my mouth. "Be silent and let me speak of the house that

will be built for you today. When it is done, when you have entered it, you will cease to be a guest in our village. You will then belong to Haapu. But one thing more is necessary if this shall truly be your home. You will take a vahine. Why should it not be me?" She removed her finger. "Now you may speak."

It was, however, Teuru who spoke, and with a certain asperity, from the doorway. "Is this the time for beginning?" she inquired. "Tonight, Titi. Tonight when he has become pliable with Marii's beer. Get him up, get him washed."

"Yes, Mama. Tonight will be without trouble. But in washing he is stubborn and refuses help."

"All right, Viriamu," said Teuru. "Scrub well, using first the soap, then a smooth stone, then the soap again. And do not sit dreaming by Hina's pool as is your custom, but go directly to the chief's where you will be asked to taste and approve."

My arrival before Marii's house coincided with the rising of the sun above the inland mountains. The lagoon came to sparkling life and warm, yellowish light flooded over the many rooftops and into the lily-bordered lanes between.

Marii came out to me with open arms and I saw that he had waited on neither the sun nor myself to begin a little experimental tasting. "Ia ora na!" he greeted, his face cheerful as the morning. "Let me embrace you." We patted each other's backs affectionately, then he held me at arm's length. "And what have we here?" he exclaimed jovially, gazing at my right ear.

"It is just a hibiscus, Marii," I said innocently. "Is this not a proper day for flowers?"

"Indeed yes," he replied with enthusiasm. "But not all of us may wear the red-petaled flower of a new love. Is it Titi?"

I snatched the blossom from its resting place. "Titi put it, there," I admitted, "but I would have you know that in Tahiti no significance is attached to the hibiscus."

Marii took the flower and reinserted it above my ear. "That is possible," he agreed when it was arranged to his satisfaction. "Here, as you have learned, our memories are longer. No, no - do not touch it. Let it lie against the temple announcing your success. And do not try to hide happiness beneath a long face."

"Marii," I said doggedly, "you do not understand."

"Of course I do," he replied, placing a fatherly arm about my shoulder and leading me toward the house. "So will others when they see the bright red bloom, for surely Titi wears its mate. Ah, Viriamu, you have chosen well."

"I have made no choice at all."

"Yes, yes. I know, I know. Often such things have the appearance of being determined quite outside ourselves, how, where, or by whom one cannot guess."

"In this case," I assured him, "guessing is unnecessary. The hand of my

priceless Teuru is clearly to be seen."

"A man is helpless, Viriamu," he continued, heedless of interruption. "Whatever his fortune, whether it be bad or, as with yourself on this day, wonderfully good, there is a single correct way to meet it."

"And what way is that?"

Marii chuckled. "He should drink a little, and laugh a lot; he should congratulate himself that he is above ground where luck of any sort may still befall him."

One is indeed helpless when it comes to resisting Tahitian good humor, and before we had covered the few steps to the door the chief's chuckles had somehow got under my own ribs and we both rocked together in unreasonable mirth.

"Enter and taste the beer," said Marii, and he whipped aside the pareu curtain to disclose his son standing with wide ears just behind it. Toma's bulk fairly filled the passage, but nor so completely as to prevent a very powerful odor from coming out.

Mari must have noticed my change of expression. "Pay no attention to the bad smell," he advised, and then looked to his son. "Well, Toma, are you going to move yourself?"

Toma gave us his vapid smile and moved himself into the street where he promptly made off toward the nearest house, carrying with him news still more delectable than that of pictures at Mama Ruau's. For a moment I thought of attempting a final protest, but Marii drew me inside and placed in my hand a large wooden dipper filled to the brim with a curious, turbid liquid.

"Empty it," he directed. "The nose may be held," he added, "if you prefer."

I managed without nose-holding and set the dipper afloat in one of the many gasoline tins which crowded the dwelling Marii appeared to expect comment. "It goes down easily," I observed.

"Yes. Perhaps you have noticed that I am able to speak this morning. As Tavae says, it is kind to the throat."

"But there is no flavor of oranges."

"True, true. Whether pia is made of oranges, pineapple, banana or any other growing thing, the taste is - what it is."

"And I think it has little strength."

Marii smiled complacently. He pointed to the dipper. "Look."

I looked and saw with a twinge of alarm that the utensil's crudely fashioned wooden bowl was bobbling back and forth over the foaming brew, colliding first with one side of the tin and then the other like a miniature and excessively busy shuttling ferry riding a troubled sea.

"Have a very little patience, Viriamu," said the chief. "Soon you will be tossed as joyously."

When I try to bring back to mind that particular Huahine day, my thoughts have a tendency to start dizzily revolving, and it requires an effort of will to

bring them long enough to rest to examine this facet or that of our glorious revelry and our equally glorious house-building. There is much that I remember; but still more, no doubt, that I forget. And even those happenings that I recall refuse to assume definite situation in either time or place. Possibly they never had one. Perhaps one thing did not, as usual, lead to another. There may, I think, have been no sequence of events. In retrospect, the arearea-of Viriamu's-fare appears to me like one magnificent, jumbled, indivisible whole which existed all at once, and I see it today, as I did at the time of its tumultuous unfolding, as a picture of, splendid confusion. Presumably a detached and sober spectator might have viewed, and recorded it otherwise. But there was no such witness present.

It must have been morning or afternoon (that the sun still shone I am very nearly certain) when Marii and I moved from his house to the site of the celebration. The transfer, which brought us from one end of the village to the other, could have been made afoot, on horseback, in wheelbarrows. I believe we walked because I can hear Marii saying, "Keep stiff the knees, Viriamu, and so remain erect." But what matter? The important thing is the scene to which we came.

A green carpet of cool banana fronds stretched all the way from Mama Ruau's to the spot close to the shore where my fare soon would stand. Flowers had been sprinkled from end to end, and each of the many score places was laid in a pattern most precise: the husked drinking nuts resting in steadying sockets of giant bamboo, the bowls of polished coconut shell - those for the pungent sauce called miti hue, for the sweet cream wrung from the coco's grated meat, for raw fish, for orange pia - all marshaled in neat rows on either side.

Marii and I were the first to be seated at this impressive board, the chief at the distant seaward extremity, myself at the inland terminal where my back rested against a rounded log of Mama's doorsteps. I am told that we remained thus in solitary grandeur for a considerable while. But although we were so greatly removed as to make conversation impossible and to reduce us to periodic exchanges of friendly signals with our respective drinking cups, it was not a time of boredom. Too much was going on. The entire population milled about us and every hand was busied. Some attacked the heaps of aito and acacia poles brought from far-off beaches, slashing and notching and trimming them to size. Some of the sturdiest young bucks drove down with heavy stones the massive pilings that replaced the flimsy twigs of Natua's planting. Boys, delighted by the explosive racket that they made, splintered long bamboos into flexible, narrow strips which they flung to their sisters for nimble interlacing. With a single sweep, women ran their sharp bush knives down the palm fronds' stems, neatly dividing them in two, then passing them on to others beneath whose agile fingers the lance-leaves flew together in the smooth, snug pattern of roofing thatch. From branches of the purau tree, children peeled long ribbons of tough, pliant bark - the stuff with which all

else that was laced or cut or woven would be tightly, securely bound in place. One might think that such activities could well enough be carried on in silence. But not in Haapu. Everybody was impelled to describe and comment upon the work of his hands, to approve or disparage that of his fellows. There were amiable disputes. There were cries of pain and pleasure, shouted orders and counter-orders. And above all the excited clamor rose the deep-chested commands of Natua, who guided and directed the whole bustling army.

It seemed to me that the chief and I sat in the very center of a welter of disorder. And yet from the confusion of hurrying bare feet, of flying chips and sailing fronds, Natua produced astonishingly quick results. No sooner was the last piling deeply bedded in the sand than a yell from him brought a squad of men bearing cross members for the floor. The minute they had been tied fast Natua lifted his voice and called for boards. Down the street they came, carried on the shoulders of a long file of tanes. These, naturally, came from the chief's house, and I believe I should have sensed as much even if it had not been possible to see, at the farther end of the village, the ornamental bed again out under the open sky. But I was now at home in Haapu and felt no annoyance at this fresh evidence of Tavae's clever arrangements. It seemed only normal that the chief's floor should be periodically ripped up for our mutual pleasure, and I bowed thanks to Marii over the avenue of banana leaves. In no time it had been laid and I was thinking, somewhat regretfully, that at this rate the house would be finished in a matter of too brief hours. There was, however, no need for concern, as I learned when Marii rose to his feet. He had prudently waited till enough of building had been accomplished to make it unlikely that we should forget what we were about, but now he spoke. His voice had weakened again so Natua, standing near him, caught up the words and amplified them with his own lungs.

"Good kind people. My beloved friends. Dear ones of our beautiful village, Haapu. Come now and surround this far reaching eat-food-thing that extends from me to the popaa. Allow no food to be brought for yet a while so that men and women may sit together. Later the ovens will be opened and then the vahines may serve us and set themselves apart. For the beginning all shall mingle. Drop for the moment your tools, leave off your weaving, splitting, tying, and bring flowers and guitars. Come and discover what has been done with the lively juice of many thousand oranges. And if anyone doubts the value of the brew, let him look to your chief or Viriamu, who have tested its worth since early morning. Enough and amen."

Prolonged cheering followed the relayed words, and before Natua had eased Marii down to his place there was a concerted rush for the verdant table of fronds. Youths appeared with the precious five-gallon tins, girls with brimming baskets of white and colored heis. Teuru sat at my left, a guitar in her lap. Tavae turned up with a large bottle of dime-store perfume.

"Beel tane!" he exclaimed warmly, and in a sudden burst of affection poured half of its contents over my head and chest.

"Peel?" someone inquired. "What thing is that?"

"In his country," Tavae explained, "words are made without thought to their sound upon the ear. It is their name for him."

"Ah," several sympathized, "what a pity, what a sadness."

But the pity was quickly forgotten when Titi arrived to decorate us with fresh garlands. "How sweet you smell, Viriamu," she murmured in admiration of the reek for which Tavae was responsible. "Hold still while I arrange the heis." Kneeling beside me, Titi performed the simple task with lingering care, and in so doing brought close together the twin hibiscus blooms we wore. A trivial and accidental occurrence, you would think. But it brought forth a burst of applause from those nearest us and inspired Teuru to make certain remarks that sent gales of laughter sweeping up and down the length of the table. Her words struck me as pretty funny, too, which goes to show to what an extent the queer feeling that had begun to creep over me at the chief's had progressed. I had been told that pia anani goes to the knees, and it is true. The knees have a tendency unexpectedly to bend and the limbs as a whole become rather more of a nuisance than a help. But nobody had thought to inform me that in time one loses all sense of responsibility for, even of connection with, himself.

No matter how frequently I raised it in acknowledgment of the invitations that were continually called from far and near, the coconut shell containing Marii's potion was always full. I had become accustomed, upon lifting it to my lips, to stare into a dull, mud-colored liquid of blank surface. But suddenly I made an amazing discovery. The brew was now a looking glass and the shell contained a quantity of diverting things. Small, familiar figures slowly cruised the circumference of the slightly effervescent lake that I balanced in my hand: Teuru meditatively scratching the belly of a blissful suckling pig held within her arms; our duck Koni-koni clambering repeatedly onto the stump of a coco bole and practicing take-offs into the wind; Captain Demming and La Folle dancing round and round and round; Pirae's shifting palms and advancing, then retreating, valleys; Tavae leaning out the kitchen door, elaborately lassoing a washbasin. . ..

"For what do you laugh?" Teuru inquired.

"Would you not laugh to see Madame Ducet and Monsieur Gaillard going to the guillotine in a tombereau?"

"Remove your nose from the beer, Viriamu. The chief is speaking to you."

"Marii asks," called Natua, "whether you are oaoa."

Content? I shouted back that I was very oaoa, but it was too mild a term to begin to describe my beatific condition. Never before had Huahine seemed so perfect, so flawless an island. Never before had my companions seemed more appealing. The bow-legged tots, the bent oldsters, the widest-hipped women - all appeared paragons of charm and grace. Even Toma, sitting at his father's side, had assumed a nearly human shape. Contentment was no word for it. I was completely ravished by the tableau that we made - and by the novel,

trickily shifting angles from which it was presented.

That the generally solid earth of Haapu had somehow come loose from its foundations I had guessed comparatively early from the odd sensation the mere act of sitting on it produced. But it was not until later that the dislocation became visually perceptible. When it happened, I chanced to be peering down-table through the couronne of ferns that Titi had jammed on my head. This direction was also, at the outset, down-wind and down-grade. The trade wind, at the time of year in which were disporting ourselves, is invariably steady and I do not mean to suggest that it veered. It was the slope that shifted. The slope, together with whatever rested on it - long, green pathway of banana leaves, equally long double rows of gesticulating brown people, massively shading purau tree, sections of new house - all lifted airily from the uninteresting horizontal. Nor was the phenomenon confined to Haapu. Evidently it was practically universal, because the lagoon, the hills of the opposite shore and even the cloud-flecked sky shared the same lazily soothing, dipping motion by which the positions of the chief and myself were gently and repeatedly reversed. At one moment I sat at the undisputed head of the table. In the next it became as undeniably the foot, while Marii was wafted grandly, unhurriedly to marked pre-eminence.

There is no knowing how long I might have continued to enjoy the refreshing seesaw if Teuru had not interrupted.

"At whom do you nod?" she asked. "No one gives attention. Why do you not take Titi's hand and say something to her?"

Eh?"

"Others will be saddened if they think you have quarreled."

"Quarrel? On a day like this?" I had to laugh at such a preposterous idea. Having done so for a while, and then forgetting what was amusing, I stopped and looked around. "Where is she"

"Beside you," said Teuru.

She was right, and I picked up the girl's hand. "Well, Tii, what shall I say?"

"Say that from now on I may do for you," she replied promptly, and leaned forward so that the creamy necklace of jasmine swung free of her breast.

"You know very well that Tavae and Teuru do everything."

Titi's lips parted to show briefly her white, white teeth. "Not everything."

Fingers flying over the strings where they converged high on the neck of the instrument, Teuru plucked from her guitar the swift, wild rhythm borrowed from the atolls. Her low laughter mingled with the rapid beat that Paumotu people claim to be born of incessantly pounding waves, and she spoke without glancing from the frets. "Well said, child. A true word."

I turned back to the girl's uptilted face. "Listen to me, Titi," I said, "for in some things I am wiser than your Mama Teuru."

"What things are those?" she inquired interestedly.

After a few moment's thought I passed over the question. "In the first place," I said, "I am old enough to have a daughter of your age."

"And young enough to acquire many more."

I tried a new tack. "Haapu is full of tanes. There must be one of them you like."

"Several," Titi agreed. "And one in particular who is very near to you." Her eyes met those of Tavae who had brought his guitar up beside Teuru to swell the throbbing music.

"Good," I said. "Then take my advice. Stick to Tahitians and don't waste your time upon popaas."

"Aue, Viriamu. You are so funny. As if there were not time for both!" Titi burst into a merry laugh and leaped to her feet. "Play, Teuru, and let me dance for him. Play, Tavae, and I shall dance for you as well."

Still other guitarists ran to join the orchestra. Other girls raced to line themselves with, Titi, and boys appeared to face them. We clapped our hands, slapped our thighs, shouted glad encouragement. And the day spun on, while the ground of Haapu lifted and fell, teetered and revolved.

Marii must have remembered to whisper the order that the cloaking leaves be thrown off the ovens because the feast appeared, then disappeared. From end to end the table of fronds was mounded high, then it was denuded.

Natua must have remembered to round up recruits from time to time, otherwise the house would never have progressed so far as a ridgepole from which Toma might crashingly, entertainingly fall. Whenever I chanced to glance up, the fare had taken a fresh spurt toward completion.

Finally the sun must have dropped into the sea, for I discovered rings of flaming torches separating us from the dark.

"It is night," I said to Teuru.

"So it has been for many hours."

I made a second discovery more startling than the first. Between myself and a now shadowy Marii there stretched an incredible quantity of food. There, again, were the pigs, the purple taro, the steaming breadfruit, the sea centipedes, the shrimps, the raw fish, boiled fish, baked fish. . . .

Titi was the nearest and I grasped her arm. "Have we not yet feasted?"

She dipped a large piece of uncooked bonito in miti hue sauce and pressed it affectionately into my mouth. "But yes. And now the time has come to begin again."

"As for the beer," said Tavae, staggering up with a heavy gas tin, "there can be no question of recommencing since we have never hesitated. Hold out your aua."

I extended the shell. Tavae filled it and, when someone jostled him from behind, precipitately poured several extra gallons in my lap. "E, e," he apologized, then smiled reassuringly. "There is plenty, plenty more."

Natua made his way from the chiefs end of the table, picking a path among the scattered forms of sleeping dogs and children. He tapped me on the

shoulder. "Marii desires you to sing."

"Me?"

"You, Viriamu."

As my friends know to their sorrow, I have nothing with which to sing, and up to a point it never occurs to me to do so. Having long since passed that point, I accepted the guitar which Teuru thrust at me. What song to choose presents no problem to a man who knows a single one. I filled the night with "Frankie and Johnny."

Tapiti!" everyone shouted when I had come to a halt for want of breath. "Again, again!"

"This time in Tahitian," Teuru demanded.

Nothing was impossible on this night. With more verve than before, I struck the guitar and turned the tale out in the vernacular of Haapu - a feat which appealed to me, even in the doing, as something of a tour de force. The last chord died away and I waited for the din of applause. None came. Between Mama Ruau's house and the lagoon there was no sound save a gentle lapping of waves and a faint sputtering from coconut oil torches. No one moved. The mountains of food were forgotten, and in the distance I dimly saw that Marii sat with bowed head held within his hands. I turned to those near est and looked into the faces over which the wavering lights played.

"Why," I gasped in dismay, "what is wrong?" Tears were coursing down all the smooth brown cheeks.

"Nothing is wrong," Teuru replied when she could find voice. "It is a great pleasure you have given us. Never have I heard such a song."

Tavae sniffed loudly. "It is beautiful," he murmured.

"Yes. Aue, yes." Teuru choked again. "And so very, very *sad*."

"Well, I am sorry if...."

"Don't be sorry," she said hastily. "We like to cry now and then. The feeling is good. But this much I cannot quite understand. Why did Faranki kill her tane with the blow-thing?"

"Because she found him on the mat with Neri Parai."

"Ua patia raua?"

"I imagine so."

"Is that all?"

"What more do you want?"

Teuru shook her head. "Faranki was a silly girl, Viriamu. Tihoni had done her no harm and might have continued to do her much good."

Our grief quickly evaporated in the general discussion that followed. But the simple tune and story were not forgotten. The American fable traveled from Haapu to other villages of Huahme, from Huahine to other islands of the Leeward group, and from there spread itself over the vast wastes of the Pacific. Only recently, a wandering ethnologist engaged in a study of ancient chants told me of his annoyance and surprise in meeting Frankie and Johnny in such out-of-the-way spots as Rapa and Rurutu - a circumstance which I

cannot refrain from mentioning because it illustrates so well the far-reaching effects of my sole contribution to contemporary Polynesian culture.

When Natua and Tavae awakened me it was very dark, although dawn was probably only an hour or two away.

"The house is finished," Natua announced.

I was about to apologize for having dozed, but a glance down the table showed me it was unnecessary. Slumber had become fairly general. All but two of the torches had burned themselves out and these two, planted on either side of the chief, guttered feebly, emitting barely enough light for me to distinguish Marii still upright among the many who had succumbed.

"If you will come with us," said Natua, "the chief will say a few words before you enter your fare. Are you capable of standing?"

"Of course he is," said Tavae generously. Bending his strong back, he grasped me under the arms, lifted me easily and set me down on my feet facing Mama Ruau, who was seated in the entrance of her home with the small hurricane lantern beside her.

She turned the wick a trifle higher. "I, too, would say a word before you go. Be happy in your new home as you have been in this."

"Thank you, Mama Ruau, thank you." I paused. "You have been here all along?"

"From beginning to end."

"Then you have seen me behaving like a..."

"Like one of ourselves," the old woman interposed. "Now go with Tavae and Narua. It would be as well, perhaps, if you were to walk between them with an arm upon their shoulders."

We went in the manner Mama Ruau suggested and came to a stop before the chief. Marii's back now rested against the legs of a rounded flight of steps as my own had done all night and day. Behind him there opened a faintly illumined, widely welcoming doorway. Sweet, fresh eaves dipped low to brush his head. Above, the broad roof swept upward to lose itself in the dark foliage of the purau tree.

"It is yours, Viriamu," said Marii in voice so faint that I bent to catch his words. "Your fare, our gift to you. Accept it, and live in it for many years to come."

We waited Tavae and I, till the chief, leaning upon Natua's steadying arm, had disappeared down the darkened lane in the direction of his home. Then we stepped within.

My small wooden chest had been placed against one of the newly woven walls. The reading lamp burned upon it, the neat criss-cross lacing of the bamboo behind taking the light of the single flame and spreading it diffused and soft through out the dwelling. Even in the instant of first acquaintance, it was a house already warmly filled with life, and in all the months that it endured I never knew it otherwise. Many were the prone pareu-covered figures who had generously come to share their sleep with me, and among

them I made out Teuru, as young-seeming and lovely in complete repose as was the more slender girl beside her against whose cheek a large red flower still lay.

I dropped on the nearest mat, but for several moments Tavae remained standing at my feet. He appeared irresolute. I struggled to hold my eyes open. "What is it?" I asked at last.

He hesitated. "Monsieur Beel, all has so far been properly done for your fare and now it rises about us a thing joyfully and well made. But I am a little troubled. I should not like to see a mistake made at the last moment."

"How could there be a mistake?"

"Well - the first night of a new fare should contain affection." Again he paused. "Titi asked that she be wakened when you entered."

"My friend," I said, "you see me with a single desire, and that for sleep. Often you have shown yourself a clever fellow. Can you not arrange this matter as you have so many others?"

"I am not without ingenuity," he admitted with a smile.

"Then take the flower." I removed the hibiscus from behind my ear and he accepted it gracefully.

A few moments passed after he had turned down the lamp before I heard Titi's sleepy voice. "Viriamu?" it said tenderly.

"No, it is I."

"Aue," still tenderly. "*Dear* Tavae."

## XXIV. *An Idol Takes Offense*

ON THE LAGOON side the new house was unconventional. A Tahitian, who prefers always to turn his eyes inward on his own people and village, would here have placed a blank wall. But I had told Natua of my incomprehensible whim, and he had bowed to it. So there was the unheard-of novelty of a second door. Haapu accepted it philosophically, realizing first that, no matter how hard one might try, a white man's tastes were never to be altogether understood, and second that it appeared to give the popaa a kind of satisfaction. The satisfaction was, in truth, immense. Above this door the seaward sloping eaves had been trimmed in a shallow arch so that by stooping slightly it was possible to walk through on to a gallery extending, open to the sky, the entire breadth of the house. Here, seated in a superlatively comfortable deck chair that Natua fashioned from old sailcloth and the hard wood of which harpoons are made, I spent untold blissfully unproductive hours.

To some the village street scene plainly never lost its appeal. Mama Ruau and Marii, for instance, both spent years regarding it, each from his respective end of the settlement, and I am sure that neither knew the meaning of ennui. But as for myself, when I had become intimately familiar with the history and temperament of every living thing that walked or flew or crawled in the sheltered lane, when I knew just what to expect of each one, from the baby with the ruptured belly button to the chief himself, there came a gradual lessening of interest and I was glad, from time to time, to look a little farther afield. From the sailcloth chair on the stilt-supported veranda it was possible to see over the reefs clear to the rim of the world in one direction, and to the central core of Huahine's mountains in the other. There could be no tedium in such a prospect. Why this should be the case I find it necessary to explain, be cause mere scenery cannot in general, so it seems to me, be found endlessly engaging.

A stone-strewn pasture, a wheatfield, or the colder Pacific waters may

eventually achieve a change of mood, but to see it happen one must wait months or entire seasons, and I have not the perseverance. In Huahine patience is not required. In Huahine each revolution of the sun displays a constantly varied pageant and no scene, no sequence is ever exactly twice repeated. Like the native peoples whose character it molds, the island's temper is ever fluctuating. But whereas there are limits to the humors that may be reflected on a human face, the play of expression on the broad countenance of Huahine is infinite in diversity. There should be no surprise that this is so. One need only look at the elements that go to make up that countenance to find the reason.

Let us see, then, of what Huahine in reality consists. It is made of sunlight and shadow, salt mists suspended over coral reefs, mountain rain, silent, somber valleys, leaning palms that rustle in the trades, whitely flashing squalls brushing the coasts and hugging the sea, lightning on the heights, clouds in the skies, clouds in the lagoons. These are the mutable materials with which imaginative Polynesian gods experiment and play, combining them all in ever-new designs, so that our island is always a different island, and as far from reaching monotonous stability as when it first pushed volcanic peaks above the waters. Only after the sun goes down does it come to anything approaching passive rest.

But even on a moonless night, even when nothing met the eyes except warm darkness, the veranda was a pleasant place to be, and not many weeks after the house had been completed I was seated there on exactly such a night. The hour could not have been late, yet the village had long quieted and the stillness was so complete that when I flicked a cigarette over the low rail, the hiss of its meeting with the lagoon came back clearly. Inside, Tavae's guitar strumming had ceased and I suspected that he slept. Teuru and Titi had gone line fishing with the canoe. I had watched them launch it from close beside the house, and had followed them for a few paddle strokes before they were lost in the dark. Now and then their voices drifted back to me, and I knew they had not gone far.

Then the awful screams began. They were screams of sheer terror and they caused me hurriedly to remove my feet from the railing and stand on them. I heard paddles frantically beating the water, and Tavae came running.

"What is it?" I demanded, none too steadily.

Tavae was still more shaken. "Ghosts, perhaps," he quavered.

"Nonsense. The trouble must be real."

He had gripped my arm. "Ghosts are a real trouble," he replied with deep conviction, and we both stared out over the water seeing nothing.

A single cry, rising higher than the screams, confirmed Tavae's suspicion. "Tupapau!" it wailed.

In house after house up and down the strand, the wicks of night lamps were raised so that the chinks in the bamboo walls glowed. And from each awakened dwelling there came a low keening. It was as if a mournfully

sighing wind passed up and down the village. "Little Teuru," they moaned. "Litle Titi." But all stayed securely within. All but one. Chancing to glance through the house behind me, I saw a swaying hurricane lantern moving across the path which festive banana fronds had so recently covered. Mama Ruau, afraid or not, was coming.

We could have been listening to the awful sounds less than a minute but already the shrieks were louder, nearer. I started to drag Tavae to the door. "Quickly!" I said. "Get your paddle."

"No, no, Viriamu!" he protested, hanging back. "You do not understand. There is nothing to be done."

Whether he was right or wrong, it became apparent in the next instant that we were too late to do anything. A canoe loomed forty or fifty feet off shore. Two shadowy figures leaped from it and raced madly thrashing through the knee deep shallows. Even before Mama Ruau had gained the steps they had dashed in the door and flung themselves sobbing on the floor. Tavae and I rushed in and stood staring helplessly at the distracted girls when the old woman entered, calmly placed her lantern on the sill, and seated herself beside them. Immediately they drew to her, and the two dark heads buried themselves in the folds of the mother-hubbard on her lap. Mama Ruau murmured soothingly as her hands moved gently over the twin manes of jet black hair, and gradually the racking sobs died away.

A sound at the door caused me to raise my eyes and discover that still another brave soul besides Teuru's mother had dared to venture abroad. Toma's round, fat, moon-face peered at us over the lantern. Then it was gone - gone, of course to spread the news that Titi and Teuru were safely at home, that they had escaped the tupapau. I went and looked down the street. The doleful plaints of fellow-feeling had everywhere subsided, even as had the more primary manifestations of grief and fright in our own house. And now, clearly indicating the progress of Haapu's shuffling, heavy-footed and earnest messenger, the lamps were again one after another turned low, the dun pools of light successively vanished from the lane, and every one recomposed himself for sleep. Everyone, that is to say, save those gathered within the fare-Viriamu. It was our family, after all, who had come so close to horrible danger, and it was only natural that we should require more time to regain a normal equilibrium.

When I turned back to the unfortunate girls they had both made partial recovery. Each was wringing sea water from her pareu, while Mama Ruau quietly spread tobacco on a dried leaf preparatory to rolling herself a cigarette. Tavae squatted near, nervously pulling at the lobe of an ear, and I hitched up my pareu and sat beside him. Although Titi and Teuru still trembled perceptibly, it seemed possible that they might be able to speak coherently.

"Where did it happen this time?" I asked.

"By the coral tower that marks the channel mouth," Teuru replied without looking up.

This was near, and Tavae started, opened his mouth, closed it and swallowed.

Mama Ruau lifted the lantern and put her cigarette to the little flame. For a moment her seamed old face was illumined and I caught the somber expression of her eyes.

I rubbed my chin. The disconcerting thing about Huahine's very considerable ghost population was that they confined themselves to no particular habitats. They might be found just about anywhere. There was, to be sure, the headless swimmer who limited his activities to a certain deep, unsounded section of the lagoon where an extremely disagreeable man was known to have drowned. There was the tupapau that periodically rode in a flaming canoe across the swath of the moon when it rested on Havai bay. And there was the phantom chanting of the ancients which chillingly, eerily rose from the tumbled stones of the once tapu temple of Farerei. But these were special cases and the general run of spirits wandered pretty much where they would. The coral tower was, then, as likely a place as any for such an encounter.

"If you wish to know about it, you will have to ask Titi," said Teuru who would, I knew, have been glad to drop the matter entirely.

Frequent as these incidents are, my interest remains unflagging. But it is annoying that I should be confined to catechizing others in search of information about the ghosts so constantly about us, without ever meeting them at first hand. Yet so it is. Never am I at the right place at the right time. In an island crowded with errant corpses, devil-possessed hens with luring human voices, ghouls who spray the blood of pigs upon house walls, traveling fires of coldly shimmering blue, dogs that float above the ground, and even occasional bewitched crabs, it appears I am destined to continue blind and unaware of all the fearful wonders. But I keep hoping. And inquiring.

"Titi," I said, "had you come to anchor?"

Titi shook her head. "The bow rested upon a ledge," she replied sadly.

Ah, I thought, then it was not as before when Teuru payed out the knotted strips of purau bark, carefully lowering an anchoring stone to the bottom, only to become paralyzed with horror when the Thing seized it and started hand over hand up the line. She had been alone that time and, even under my intensive cross-examination, never gave a very exact picture of what she had seen. It was of indefinite shape, indefinite size; it was evilly luminous; it rose swiftly to the surface. Luckily she had managed to scream lustily and so break the numbing spell in which, for a few dreadful seconds, she was held. Luckily, too, there happened to be a bush knife lying at her feet so that she was able to sever the anchor cord with a single tremendous swipe, and then make off at top speed. Otherwise, as'was generally recognized, we should never have seen our dear friend again.

"Tell me, Titi," I continued, "were you fishing?"

"We broke minnows in small pieces and scattered them on the water. Then

we baited our lines. I had just had a bite that caused the bamboo to jump in my hands. It could have been no less than a paaihere."

"And you lost the fish?"

"But certainly. Together with the pole and the harpoon which lay on the boom."

"Now try to remember carefully. Exactly what did it look like?"

"As to that, you will have to ask Teuru."

"No, Titi. I am asking you. What did you see?"

Titi had found a knothole in the floor and twisted her finger round and round within it.

"Well?"

"This way it was, Viriamu. I was watching my line."

"Yes?"

"That is all."

"What do you mean, 'that is all'?"

Titi paused and then took a breath. "I saw nothing else."

Teuru's head jerked up rather abruptly and we both stared at the younger girl with varying degrees of astonishment.

"You saw nothing.....?"

"No."

"Then why did you make such a frightful noise? Why were you screaming?"

Titi's chin assumed a dogged, almost defiant, firmness. "I screamed because Teuru screamed."

Teuru shook her head. "It is not so, Titi. You were the first."

"No," she denied, "O oe - it was you."

"O oe."

"Oe!"

"Wait a minute," I protested. "Didn't *you* see a tupapau, Teuru?"

Now it was her turn to hesitate. "No," she confessed at last, "not exactly. I thought Titi ... " Her voice trailed away.

Mama Ruau sighed faintly, took up her lantern, and quietly left the house.

Tavae gave a groan of disgust and rolled over onto his mat.

"Come, Viriamu," he advised. "Let us sleep. They are two crazy ones."

I accepted his suggestion and stretched myself out. The lamp was lowered, leaving the room in darkness save for a blurred, shadowy circle which the chimney painted on the thatch high above. We were enveloped by a silence as complete as that which had reigned in the village before the misunderstanding arose.

Then Teuru spoke. "I do not see, Titi, why you should do such a thing."

"But what have I done?" the girl asked unhappily. "It was only when I felt the fish bite that I gave a little yelp."

"Oh." Teuru took a short while to digest this information. "Another time," she finally directed, "it would be well if you yelp less suddenly, and more

quietly. Now, Titi, say your prayers."

Obediently, Titi prayed.

Let no one think, however, that all such alarms are false. Much transpires in Huahine that fails to impinge upon a white man's duller senses, and he would be unreasonable not to grant that it is so. The keenly attuned native mind is aware of many intangible influences - the thoughts of the dead departed, the wishes of the ancient gods - that can never penetrate my own. It is wise (as I was sometimes not) to listen to what is said and believed throughout an island's length and breadth, and not to meddle or object. I did not bring the knowledge to Huahine; I acquired it there, together with recognition of the fact that the pagan past lies uneasy in a shallow grave. Much as I should have liked to be able to tell of tupapaus met face to face, what I am about to relate is of the same genre, and it begins with a stomach-ache belonging to Teuru.

The pain in her opu was not violent, but persistent. First appearing on a Sunday, it was still there on the following Sunday. In the meantime Haapu's medicine-men had come forward with a large assortment of remedies and she had dutifully tried each one. She had drunk pulverized berries in coconut water, dried fish in coconut water, leaves, ferns, flowers and roots in coconut water. She was ready to burst with coconut water, and no good was done. No other conclusion was possible: a bad spirit had entered and crouched in Teuru's bowels.

Nothing on earth is more doleful than a Tahitian who does not feel well. Teuru lay limp and dejected on a mat laid in the center of the floor. In a circle about her were gathered fifteen' or twenty women who had come to watch and comment upon her illness. The patient's eyes were closed and her cheeks showed a trace of pallor. From time to time her lips parted to emit a weak and sorrowful voice.

"Dear little friends, I fear it is the end."

"Ehe, ehe," the watchers would moan dismally. "Ehe, ehe." Gently they rocked themselves to and fro.

Although the individuals comprising it might change, whenever I came in from the veranda I beheld the same dispirited assembly, with Teuru lying wan and hopeless in the middle. Even the weather had adjusted itself to the flabby despondency of our household and the sky was gloomily overcast.

"Perhaps I shall die."

"Ehe."

"And be laid away in the ground."

"Ehe, ehe."

If it continued much longer I felt I should be joining the woeful, responsive chorus myself. "If you had been willing to drink the glass of soda water at the start," I said, "you would not be laid anywhere."

Teuru managed to find strength to open her eyes. She looked up to me

sadly, sweetly. "Ah, Viriamu, I have tried to serve you well. And now ... and now .:." Apparently the effort of further speech was too much.

"It is not too late. I will mix it, you will drink it, and tomorrow you'll be well."

"No," said Teuru in a tone suddenly much stronger. "How often must I tell you that your white powder may be good for popaas but that it could only sicken a Tahitian?"

"Well, you're sick already, aren't you?"

"Aue, yes," she replied faintly, remembering.

"If you're going to die anyway, you might as well try it"

"No, no, no!"

I threw up my hands. Teuru groaned. The others ehe'd. Then Mama Ruau came into the house.

"Get up, child," she said to her daughter. "The canoe is ready. All the men are gone to the vanilla patches or out with the nets, and Titi is with them. But I have found Toma who has agreed to take a paddle." She looked to me. "Perhaps you will take the other, Viriamu?"

"Yes" I said. "Of course. Where are we going?"

"You are going to Maroe," Mama Ruau informed me.

"That is a good many miles."

"With paddlers no more expert than yourself and Toma, hours will be required," she agreed. "But there is no help for it. At Maroe you must bring Teuru to the house of my niece, Fetia. She is no more than middle-aged, yet in some matters she is very wise. You have heard of her, I think?"

I had. Her reputation was island-wide, and I knew that her cures were not brought about by anything so innocent as coconut water. She was, in fact, a witch.

"But, Mama Ruau," I protested, "for the belly-ache a little soda ... "

"This is not a simple question of wind in the stomach, else we should quickly have removed it ourselves. Now go along before it begins to storm."

The canoe floated a few yards offshore and I waded out to it, slipped between the surrounding huddle of mourners, and sat on the stern thwart. Someone handed me a paddle. A wide length of planking such as coffins are made of had been placed over the gunwales, and on this Teuru was disposed. Her head very nearly touched my knees. Toma slumped on the seat forward. Many pairs of hands gave us a push toward the channel.

"Return safely," they called as we drifted off.

Feebly, Teuru waved.

"Return, our dear one. Come back to us living, and not dead."

I discovered that we were badly off balance. The bow was dangerously depressed, whereas Teuru and I rode in a stern lifted clear of the water.

"Shove yourself aft, Toma," I commanded.

Toma complied.

"Now paddle," I added when he made no further move, and this also Toma

did, though with a complete absence of verve.

We had no more than made our sluggish way out of the narrows and turned down the coast when the rain started. Having started, it kept on. It was not an isolated, merry squall. In harmony with our unhappy circumstances, Huahine dissolved in a flood of warm tears, and the whole island was enveloped by a somber grayness. The mountains were lost in gray clouds, the coconut plantations were shrouded in successive curtains of gray rain, and the reefs were completely hidden where the downpour mingled with salty mist. Gray smoke rose from the surface of the lagoon all about us, and in glum silence, like a veritable barge of the dead, we pressed on. Looking down at Teuru's supine form, it occurred to me that the funeral canoe of a famous queen of Huahine must have presented much the spectacle that did we. There was, besides a parallel between the two voyages made so many hundred years apart. Both Tahitian women sought miraculous cure, the ancient ruler for death and Teuru for an ache of the stomach. In the case of Huahine's queen, recovery was nearly complete. She had been dead five days before she was transported to an islet for burial, and there, at the last minute, she came to life again and returned to her husband. Except for a few blemishes of the skin, she was as good as ever. Yet knowledge of this curious bit of history failed to give me confidence in the success of our own mission, and when we disembarked at dreary, rain soaked Maroe I was as lacking in hope as Teuru herself appeared to be.

The people of the village must have sensed that we brought no cheer. Unmet, unwelcomed, we stepped out of the canoe on to the slippery mud of a low embankment and, with our pareus plastered wetly against our bodies, set off inland toward the house of far-famed Fetia. No audience being present, Teuru walked unassisted, which was fortunate because Toma repeatedly lost his footing and I was in little better case. A rivulet somewhere in the vicinity had left its customary path to race down the village street. Upstream against the swirling current we floundered, and so came at last to a small dwelling with thinning roof and decayed underpinning.

"Fetia! Teuru called. "Fetia-far-seeing!"

"O vai tera?"

"It is I, Teuru of Haapu."

Feria came to the raised doorway and looked down at us. She was not what I expected. However unreasonably, I had arrived in Maroe with a number of preconceived notions about witches, notions derived principally from Halloween knickknacks and the picture books of childhood. Feria, therefore, should have had the curved beak and sharp eyes of a bird of prey; her hair should have been stringy and wind-tangled, her lips thin, teeth long, body scrawny. She wholly failed to meet the specifications. She might have been an older sister of Teuru, a sister with the additional plumpness that ten or fifteen more years of easy living is sure to bring.

She smiled affably. "E ua."

"Yes," Teuru agreed, "it rains."

"Come and dry yourselves," she invited, and we climbed up out of the river and went in.

"Teuru has a tupapau," Toma explained as soon as we were seated.

"Of course," said Fetia comfortably. "I knew you were coming."

"How could that be?" I inquired politely. "We did not know it ourselves until the moment of leaving."

"Is this the popaa of whom everyone speaks?" Fetia asked.

Teuru nodded. "His name is Viriamu."

"Ah. Well, Viriamu, I will say a word to you and you may listen. I knew of your coming because I saw it. You left Haapu in a canoe that the fat boy caused to float crookedly in the water."

"But we are separated from Haapu by the thickness of the island. Mountains lie between!"

"That is so." She turned pleasantly to Teuru. "Now, my girl, where has the tupapau lodged?"

"Here." Teuru pressed both hands over the affected area.

"In the opu?" Experimentally, she prodded Teuru's stomach here and there. "You have not an aiu inside?"

Teuru hung her head. "I have not yet succeeded in catching a child," she confessed.

"Never mind," said Feria brightly, "there is plenty of time. Barrenness, too, is easily cured, though not with medicines. No, not with medicine .... " For some minutes she regarded Teuru thoughtfully, and then proclaimed suddenly her findings. "You have offended," she stated.

We waited while Teuru searched her memory for any missteps that she might have made.

"You have not scoffed at the dead?" Feria hazarded.

"No."

"Nor belittled the old gods?"

"Oh, no."

"Nor walked in tapu places?"

"Never!"

"Nor killed a chicken of odd behavior?"

"Aita! Teuru's denial was vehement.

"Then," said Fetia, "it is someone else who is guilty. Do you feel the tupapau as a heaviness, or as pain?"

"It is pain."

"And when did it come?"

Teuru counted on her fingers and announced that it had come seven days ago.

"That was a Sunday," I explained, "and Teuru gorged herself with miti hue that was stale and old."

Feria gave me an indulgent smile in recognition of the irrelevancy of this

remark ( the last, incidentally, that I attempted to inject) and then returned to the diagnosis. "During the seven days, Teuru, have you lived in the same house?"

"The same."

"Who has lived in it with you?"

"They are many."

"Naturally."

"You would have the names?"

Fetia said that she would and so, with only occasional pauses, Teuru reeled off the list of the itinerant population that might at one time or another be found sleeping within my house.

"Of these people," Fetia demanded, "is there not one whom you have seen do a strange or improper thing?"

Teuru considered lengthily but appeared unable to bring anything significant to light.

"Think well," Fetia insisted. "There must have been a wrongdoing."

We had come to an impasse and for some while sat silent, listening to the rush of the rain without. Toma stirred. He looked uneasily from Fetia to me, and back again. Then he made his unnecessary remark.

"Viriamu has been forgotten."

"Forgotten?" Fetia was interested.

"He also sleeps in the fare."

"He does? Why did you not speak of it, Teuru?"

"From thoughtlessness," she apologized. "The house is his."

"Hmmm." Fetia turned her eyes on me, and although their expression remained kindly, I sensed that I had ceased to be a simple bystander and become a very suspicious object.

"I wish to know, Teuru," said Fetia slowly, without taking her glance from me, "in what ways is he queer aside from the color of his skin?"

"In none, I think," she replied dully.

"Wake up, child," the older woman exclaimed. "He has surely other oddities."

Teuru would gladly have obliged, but once more she failed. "No, Fetia, he is little different from any tane of your village or mine. He eats and drinks, talks, smokes and sleeps much as we do. He wears the same clothes as ourselves, and bathes very nearly as frequently. If he had not the misfortune of being pale, he might be our cousin."

Fetia was clearly disappointed. Baffled, too, perhaps. We did not seem to be getting anywhere. Teuru hugged her stomach and stared disconsolately at her toes. Then, suddenly, she looked up. "An idea has come," she told us, and pointed to the place where it had arrived. "He has a habit that is unfriendly and disagreeable."

Yes?" said Fetia, reviving. "What is that?"

"Often he removes himself from us and hides in a book."

"And what does he do in it?"

"He reads what is written."

Teuru's face fell as Fetia waved this information aside. "It is a curious habit," she conceded. "However, it could do neither good nor harm to the popaa himself or others."

Fine, I thought, that lets Viriamu out. But I had not counted on Toma's helpfulness. He leaned toward Teuru so that his puffy face was hardly a foot from hers. Suddenly he grimaced at her so horribly that she drew quickly away, and we all caught our breaths. His lips curled from the gums till the very molars were exposed. Holding a stubby index finger horizontal, he wagged it rapidly back and forth before his mouth.

"What's the matter with him?" Fetia asked.

"I - I don't know," Teuru faltered.

It looked as if a second tupapau, more virulent than Teuru's, had gotten into the chief's son. Then, quickly as it had begun, Toma's seizure left him and he delivered his final, damning bit of evidence. "Tell her," he said, "about the washing of teeth."

"Oh," Teuru gasped. "Oh, yes. *That* is a queerness worthy of telling."

"Explain," Fetia demanded.

"He has a little broom."

"Yes?"

"On it he spreads sweet-smelling soap each morning and night."

"And then?"

"Then he sweeps it up and down and around over his teeth and spits."

"Ea, ea!" Fetia exclaimed in wonder. She stared at me incredulously. Then she recalled herself. "Where does he do this thing? Where does he spit?"

"Out the window and onto the ground."

Fetia gave a shout of triumph. Na reira - that's it! Now I can see. Now I can advise. One question more. On what ground does the house stand?"

"On the ground whose name is Miru."

"I know it well. And is the window on this side or that?"

"On that."

"Aue, aue," Fetia cried. "Do you know what this ignorant man has been doing? He has been spitting on a tiki!"

"There is no idol beneath the window," Teuru began.

"Do not contradict me," Fetia reprimanded, gazing up into the obscurity of the sodden thatch. "I see it clearly. It is a tiki of stone made by our ancestors. It lies face upturned and great eyes wide in the dark soil."

Teuru moaned pitifully. "Dear Fetia, what must we do?"

"Two things are necessary," the amiable witch stated. "First, Viriamu must stop playing with his teeth."

"Ah," said Teuru, glancing at me uncertainly, "I fear a difficulty."

"What difficulty can there be?"

"Only Viriamu himself. It is, you see, a custom of which he is

passionately fond. He would even impose it upon others if he could, as this happening will show. Once he was angered because I punished the younger children in the house when they had failed to say their prayers. 'Dammeet,' he said - that is a word they use much - 'Dammeet, is not brushing of their teeth more important?' And he gave each child one of the little brooms together with some of the sweet soap. For more than two weeks he went around each night feeling of each little broom to see if it was damp with use."

"And afterward?" Fetia asked.

"Afterward it was forgotten." Teuru paused then thought to add, "The children ate the soap."

Fetia considered. "Well," she decided, "if his attachment to it is so great, he may continue. But he must lean from the window to this side where no tiki is below. And secondly, your positions for sleeping must be changed. In what direction have you lain?"

"With heads seaward."

"Then let everyone turn about to show that Viriamu's offense is recognized and that you wish to make amends. Do exactly as I say, Teuru, and the tupapau will leave you."

The simple prospect of deliverance had a beneficial effect upon Teuru. She smiled for the first time in a long week. She thanked Fetia profusely, not forgetting to promise that Tavae would soon appear at her door with gifts. We went back to our canoe and returned through the rain to Haapu.

That night, Fetia's instructions were meticulously carried out. I spat as directed; we all slept as directed. Morning came. The cheery sun blazed forth. The clouds had gone and so had Teuru's pain.

## XXV. *Papera*

SHAMELESS and possibly artful flattery that it was, I had been not at all displeased by Titi's remark that I was still of an age to acquire numerous children. She let the suggestion fall, it will be remembered, during the house-building festival. But at that time, even though my condition was such as to casually accept many wonders, I should have laughed at the idea that a bare month later I would be possessed of the first - a fine, ready-made boy, five years old.

Papera's entry into my life was as accidental as his original conception. It happened on a day when the vanilla was ripe for cutting, when practically everyone had in consequence left the village to go into the hillside patches, and when it was reasonable to suppose that Haapu would doze uneventfully until their return. Even Mama Ruau had left in her canoe, to bind the long, green beans into firm, round bundles as they were carried down to her. As far as I know, only four people remained behind. In a house about midway from my own to Marii's there was a young mother, Monoi by name, who had stayed because her breasts hurt. There was her most recently born, a creeper, who had stayed because he had no choice in the matter. Lying in the shade of a tree, there was Toma who had stayed because it required less effort than going. Lastly, for reasons similar to those of the chiefs son, there was myself. Between us we succeeded in generating the chain of circumstances that led to Papera.

Monoi's infant started it when, in his crawlings over the floor, he came upon a butter tin half filled with kerosene which someone had carelessly left in a corner. Seizing it in his chubby hands, he carried it to his mouth and took several avid swallows before toppling over unconscious. The mother rushed to him, snatched him up and ran shrieking out of the house.

"Tauturu!" she cried frantically. "Help, help!"

But there was woefully little help available. Distractedly she glanced up and down the lane. Toma had struggled to his feet, and I had come to the door. No other soul was in sight. For a moment Manoi hovered in terrible

indecision between the two sorry alternatives, then turned in my direction and came racing with the inert bundle clutched close against her. She took the three coconut-log steps at a single leap and burst in to kneel and drop the babe before me.

"Viriamu," she implored, rolling her eyes up wildly, "make him wake, make my little aiu wake!"

As Toma came puffing in I turned the small creature face upward and saw that its eyes were indeed closed. I felt of it gingerly here and there, and it felt as most babies do - pudgy and soft and warm. But something was the matter with its breathing. It would inhale, exhale, and then wait a long time before doing so again. I shook it a little without result.

Toma stood looking down with as little sign of initiative as he might have exhibited if he had been staring at a bug that had somehow got itself into trouble. Yet, as always, he had a sug gestion. "The aiu," he observed, "has the air of one who is taero."

Strangely, he was right. For taero means either of two things - drunk or poisoned - and our aiu, as it developed, was both.

"When did he go to sleep?" I asked the distraught woman.

"When he drank of kerosene," she whimpered.

"No!"

"Yes."

"What a stupidity!" I exclaimed with stupidity as great, and looked hurriedly around the room. I was wishing, praying that Mama Ruau might miraculously appear to competently, confidently take charge of the distressing problem that Monoi had so literally cast at my feet. But she was far away and I was alone with a shamefully overgrown boy and a helpless female who now began to wring her hands and cry. Something had to be done. I tried to think. There must be an antidote? I had vague ideas of what to do for snake-bite, arsenic, etc., etc. An old almanac was somewhere about, probably in the musical chest. But who would be so fanciful as to write what must be done for kerosene? It struck me that the best thing might be to find out what the stuff was like and, rising, I went quickly to the lamp, unscrewed the top and put the bowl to my lips.

"It is strong, eh?" Toma remarked sociably when he saw me gasp for breath.

Again he was correct. It was strong as any Mexican moonshine I ever encountered in prohibition days, and equally vile tasting. Furthermore, it produced an instant buzzing in the head, but not of a pleasant variety. The experiment caused me to think there was only one remedy, and I returned rapidly to the tiny patient and lifted him.

"Grasp him by the heels, Toma," I said.

Toma's jaw sagged with incomprehension. 'Nafea?" he asked blankly.

"By the heels," I repeated. "Here, give me your hands. Put them there and there. Now hold him up."

Monoi gave a heart-rending wail when she beheld her infant dangling from the big paws of the chief's son.

Toma simpered. "Aiu is upside down," he informed me.

"Stop swinging him," I said severely, and placing myself beneath, I opened the babe's mouth to insert a finger m his throat. Promptly and satisfactorily, he regurgitated.

"Aue," Monoi cried in mounting grief, 'now he is sick."

"No," I denied with false assurance. "Now he will soon be well. Put him on the mat, Toma."

Toma lowered his charge gently and we sat down to watch. "A little time is required," I explained. Although the throbbing in my own head had quickly subsided, it seemed reasonable to suppose that aiu, being smaller and less accustomed to poisons, might take longer to come out of it. He did. Nearly a half hour passed, and I was getting decidedly worried when he opened his eyes and crowed. Monoi threw herself upon him and covered him with kisses. Next she did the same to me. Then she gathered up her little drunkard and carried him home. Toma followed, but at the door he turned.

"Mea maramarama," he said in frank admiration. "You are a bright thing, Viriamu."

"It was not brightness, Toma," I replied with the modesty born of great self-satisfaction. "It was merely normal good sense."

As soon as the people returned to the village, Toma went from door to door to spread the news, and in this single in stance his tale-bearing seemed to me more or less justifiable. The stream of well-wishers who came to thank and congratulate me continued all through the afternoon. My own family, Teuru and Tavae and Mama Ruau, were very proud and said so in many ways with customary volubility. Twenty times and more I repeated the story of the throwing-up to as many fascinated audiences. But by evening, when we had wrung from it every possible ounce of feeling - horror, suspense, hope, joy - I imagined that the incident was closed. It was a mistaken assumption. The wheels which Monoi's inquisitive aiu set in motion had not yet come to a stand, and the final consequence of his tippling did not overtake me till near sundown.

It was that hour of semi-madness when Haapu swims through a light of bewildering green, when birds, dogs and children lose temporary control of themselves and all chatter and bay and scream in uproarious unison. Older folk may sit quietly, but there is something contagious in the brief bedlam that accompanies the closing of the day, and it has a tendency to make one's senses reel. Probably that is what my own were doing, and probably that is why I failed to notice either Monoi, her husband Nini, or the small boy when they came onto the veranda. At one moment I was alone in the sailcloth chair; in the next I looked up and there they were.

"Enter," I said, slightly startled. "Come inside."

Having already done so, they made no further move.

"Sit down," I then urged, more appropriately. "Sit here on the floor beside me."

The young husband and wife complied and the tot came to stand between them. Later, when I had the inspiration to make a shower out of an old wine-cask, it was Nini's duty to mount a sort of ladder and pour water into the perforated barrel while I sloshed beneath. We then became fast friends. But now Nini was bashful and ill at ease, a fact which I attributed to our still meager acquaintanceship whereas, in truth, it was occasioned purely by the importance of his mission. He looked at me, he looked at Monoi, he smoothed a lock of the boys hair back from his forehead. We smiled at each other again and again, and for a considerable while exchanged no word. Presumably Nini had come to thank me a final time for the day's impromptu good deed and was having trouble to think of a fresh way of putting it. Monoi nodded her head at him as if admonishing him to begin, and once Nini opened his mouth, but the speech refused to come.

They were an attractive couple. Nini might have been twenty-four, the girl a year or two younger, yet the present solemnity of their faces gave them an exaggeratedly youthful air. It could not have been altogether a trick of the emerald light which shimmered all about us, from the lagoon at our feet, from the fronds reaching along the shore to either side. Both of them appeared of an age to be racing in the streets with the bigger children, playing their games, joining their shouts and laughter. Yet they were man and wife, mature citizens of Haapu. They had a home, and though it was small it already contained a half dozen of their progeny, with room enough to spare for many more. They were entitled to a voice in every village decision, entitled to share in every village activity. Despite the semblance of juvenility, they were fully grown - taata paari - and had the right as well to determine their own affairs. Slow as I was in understanding, it was this right that Monoi and Nini had come to my house to exercise.

I looked from one to the other of these two very typical Polynesians, the girl less comely than Teuru but appealingly even-featured and well made, the man less handsome than Tavae but supple-limbed and smiling. "Well, what is there of new?" I prompted.

Monoi adjusted the large red comb in her hair, a decoration worn only on notable occasions. "Nini," she said, "the time has come to speak."

"Yes," Nini admitted, "the time has come."

"Why do you swallow your tongue?" his wife asked. "You need not be ashamed of Papera; there is no better boy in Haapu."

"That is true," Nini agreed warmly. I had so far paid scant attention to the child, but now his father thrust him abruptly forward. "This is Papera," he said proudly.

Though no thread was at the moment in his hand, I immediately recognized the diminutive flyer of wasps. Shy at being so suddenly pushed up-stage, he stood with long, curling lashes lowered. Barring a single white

tiare blossom that his mother had lovingly tucked behind his ear, Papera was just as he first arrived upon Huahine. On second thought, it may be wrong to except the flower; for all I know, the babes on this marvelous island come so equipped. In any case, every inch of his perfect little body was airily, happily, properly exposed to the leveling rays of the sun, and every inch softly glowed. I have mentioned before the fine texture of native skin, but Papera's - due, I suppose, to the few years it had weathered - was of a positively satin smoothness. All over, it fitted nicely; all over, it was the same warm tint of brown.

"Wish the popaa that he may live," his mother directed.

Papera made an "o" of his mouth and then dutifully spoke through it. "Ia ora na," he repeated, so faintly that the words were barely audible above the prattle of mynas in adjacent trees. Having done this much, he remained primed for further speech if it were required of him.

Monoi evidently felt the greeting to be sufficient. "Enough, she told him gently, whereupon Papera's lips came together and the small "o" vanished.

"You like him?" Nini asked eagerly.

"Like him?" I said, slightly puzzled by the question. "Why, of course." And it was true. Although there are times when I prefer them at a distance, I am very fond of the children of Haapu, and of them all there was truly none more adorable than the little fellow who remained before me with eyes still downcast.

"Viriamu," said Nini with great sincerity, "Papera is the most beautiful thing we have to give. Take him, dear friend. He is yours."

At these words two things happened almost simultaneously. My back left the comfortable curve of the sailcloth and I sat bolt upright. Papera's silky lashes slowly lifted and his large round eyes turned up to me with a look of ineffable sweetness. For a long moment we stared at each other - the Polynesian child in quiet trust, the popaa in absurd, but perhaps understandable, alarm. Then Papera's glance lowered and he resumed demure inspection of his toes.

"Really, Nini," I stammered, "I don't know how to....it is very difficult to . . ."

"Do not try," he said, raising a hand in generous protest. "Thanks are unnecessary."

"But I couldn't possibly... I would never think to ....

"Thought, also, is unnecessary," Monoi assured me pleasantly.

"Please let me speak," I said a little desperately. "What I am trying to tell you is that I could never for a moment think of taking your son away from you."

"It is that you prefer a girl?"

"No, no, no. It is that all your children are yours to enjoy. I must not separate you from any one of them."

"Do not worry yourself," said Nini. "Five will be left to us."

"Six," Monoi corrected, patting herself happily. "Another is here in the making."

Nini laughed. "You see? It is no trouble. She is a good wife. She is always making."

Papera continued to stand stoically still, but though he had the air of patiently and submissively waiting to learn what was to become of him, I think it likely - knowing him as I do today that he was in truth paying no attention. The chances are he was pondering some problem concerning fat, prettily soaring wasps.

In my efforts to think of a graceful means of escape from the appalling responsibility which he seemed to represent, I must have been frowning, because a shadow crossed Monoi's brow. "Viriamu," she faltered. "Do you find something wrong with him?"

Before I could reply she got to her knees. As if it were a moderate-sized breadfruit that she clasped, the outspread fingers of one hand capped the rounded dome of her offspring's head, while with the other she spun him around, first right, then left. Papera lost none of his composure under this unusual treatment. Even when his mother's controlling fingers halted a pirouette so abruptly that his chubby cheeks quivered, his face remained set in its customary expression of mild, and very slightly bemused, good humor. I would have expected him to laugh or cry. He did neither. He exhibited no emotion of any sort, and without understanding or questioning the reason for his twirlings, demonstrated a willingness to help as best he could by rapidly lifting and lowering his feet in a lively trotting that led nowhere.

"Look, Viriamu," said Monoi briskly, and she brought her animated pinwheel to a stop so that he presented his left side. She held up his arm. "Feel this," she demanded.

Acquiescently, I felt of Papera's biceps, which was naturally negligible from having been in use so short a while.

"Now the other." Monoi gave the compliant little top a deft turn-and-a-half, and the right arm was offered for examination. "You see," she pointed out, "they are of even length, they bend as they should - " The bending was demonstrated. "They are properly attached." Jerking showed they did not come off. Another spin disposed Papera so that I confronted his back. Monoi took my hand and ran it down his spine. "Is it not straight as a harpoon?" She massaged the abbreviated, nicely molded legs. "Are they not made for nimble swimming and for running?" She slapped his firm little buttocks. "Has he not all that is needed for good sitting?" Again Papera was set in motion. He jogged through a complete revolution and continued on till we were face to face. There Monoi halted him. She pointed out his closely fitting ears, his gently curving brows, his small up-tilted nose, his mouth, his cheeks and deeply dimpled chin. She rubbed his sleek, banana-fattened little opu. "It will be large some day," she promised. "Many a feast will go within. And see here, Viriamu. The time will come when he may give much pleasure to the girls."

Papera looked down where his mother fondled him. Then, as once before, the lashes lifted and his big round eyes gazed into mine. His face lighted. His lips parted to show a row of pearly teeth. He gave me an utterly disarming, a wholly irresistible, completely ravishing smile.

Monoi sat back against her heels and put hands on her hips. "You have seen all there is," she said truthfully. "Is he not perfect?"

If I had floundered before, now I was lost - lost to Papera's charms. "He is, he is," I agreed rashly, but sincerely. "I think no one lives who would not want him."

"Good," said Nini, impelling him toward me. "Take him in your arms."

When Papera slipped between my knees I found it impossible to resist Nini's suggestion, and it was in this position that Teuru found us.

She walked onto the veranda beaming happily. "Now you are rich, Viriamu. Are you not glad that we came to Haapu?"

Looking over Papera's head I appealed to her in French. "Name of a name, Teuru - what am I to *do*?"

"Do?"

"They want to give me this child!"

"But of course. Monoi and Nini asked me first what' I thought you would most like."

"And you told them ... ? You must be mad."

Teuru looked surprised. And injured. "You do not like him, Monsieur Beel?"

"Like him? Of course I do. I think I'm crazy about him. But what do I know about children? It's impossible. You must tell them so."

"Ah, no," said Teuru firmly. "*That* is impossible. Do you wish to cause our friends sorrow? Do you wish to see them cry? Then you cannot refuse. One should always accept what is offered in kindness. And do not be troubled about your lack of knowledge."

"Why not?"

"Because Papera will not require it of you."

"No?"

"No. He will ask only for love, and that is easily given."

Papera had got himself up on my knee. I looked at him. My initial panic had considerably diminished. He was swinging his legs and curling his toes. Perhaps he presented a less frightening problem than I had at first imagined? Perhaps he presented no problem at all, but something very different - a promise of never-ending delight? If I was gradually becoming more receptive to the idea of so extraordinary and offhand an adoption it was, however, due much less to Teuru's words than to Papera himself. Nevertheless, I raised a last half-hearted objection. "How am I ever to take care of him?"

"Has he not already learned to eat and sleep and swim and play?" Teuru asked. "He will take care of himself. Besides, I shall always be near."

Well," I mused, "it might be fun to watch him grow. He could go to the

school in Pirae and learn of how many districts la belle France consists." A sad thought struck me. "But they would put clothes on him."

"That will do no harm," said Teuru. "I shall make him a shirt to cover his little pito-pito." (A pito-pito is a button, or a navel of small size.)

"He may become a great man," I suggested. "A musician, or a dancer, or perhaps even the captain of the *Poti Raiatea*." I found my mind filling with plans, speculations, curiosities, all centering upon Monoi's brown, coconut-scented son. Yet today - several years removed from these happenings - I am rather glad to be able to report that Papera does not, after all, appear destined for greatness. He has divided his time almost equally between Pirae and his own Haapu. He has gone to school now and then, accepting it with the mild good humor and patience that are the keystones of his character, but never evincing any especial interest or ambition. He bids fair to remain an average Tahitian - which is probably the most comfortable state to be found on earth. On occasion he is still to be seen trotting about, trailed by a wasp which floats a short distance above and behind his head. By looking closely, one can see the thread which connects the two.

I can also disclose that in this land the cares of fatherhood are, quite as Teuru intimated, inconsequential. For all practical purposes they may be said not to exist. Try as I will, I can think of only one instance in which Papera caused anything that might be considered a nuisance, and then it was only a very small one. It was on his first morning in Tahiti. We had arrived late the previous night. Papera's eyes had closed long before the schooner reached Papeete. He was, I learned, a sound sleeper. Neither the excitement of debarkation nor the wild ride to Pirae in Svengali's camionette awakened him. Teuru deposited him in a corner on the living-room floor and Tavae tucked a pareu about him. Then, after promising to come early in the morning, they left. But it was barely daybreak when Papera, having had enough sleep, got up. He looked at the strange house filled with chairs, tables, books, pictures and other queer and rather frightening things. He looked outside, seeking, I imagine, the twin rows of dwellings among which he had romped all his five years. Instead he discovered a different, unfamiliar world - and a rainy one besides. His initial impression was not favorable. Probably his lips trembled slightly as he set them in the little circle through which softly to call, "Teuru ... " But at this hour Teuru was, of course, still at Quinn's with the market basket and an aperitif before her. I was only dimly aware of Papera's progress from room to room and it was not till he opened my door and peeked in before giving his plaintive call, that I came fully awake.

"She will come, aiu," I said. "You must wait a little because she is far away."

The words "far away" were badly chosen. They caused Papera to take alarm. He burst into sobs and, turning, rushed out of the house. I cast off the covers and hurried after him. But at the door I stopped, relieved to see that he was not bent upon running away. As when he jogged up and down during his

original demonstration, Papera was again in vigorous motion - and again was getting nowhere in particular. The small legs which Monoi had pointed out to be so well suited for running were carrying him round and round the house through the rain. Every few yards he interrupted his sobbing to fill his lungs, tilt back his head and call up to the wet, gray sky. "Teuru-aue, Teuru-u-u!" I should have gone immediately to capture him. Yet the pathos of the picture he made was so arresting that for moments I remained fascinatedly watching. No other living creature was in sight. He might have been the first, or the last, of human kind to be placed upon the earth - and so, I guess, he felt. Beyond him, somber seas rode in from the pass. Above, the dripping giants that were coco palms towered, and beneath them, brown and doll-like, Papera hurried over the cold, drenched ground. I waited till the naked determinedly trotting mite had made four circuits of the house, then stepped out and intercepted him.

I carried him in and soon after we heard the cheery bell of Teuru's bicycle. A moment later she appeared, dark hair spangled with white rain drops, sweet-smelling flowers about her throat, and the perfume of pineapple wine upon her breath. Papera was gathered into her warm arms where he quickly discovered that Tahiti, too, was a good place to be.

But to return to Haapu, and the veranda, and the green light of evening. Noting that I smiled and that I appeared to take pleasure in playing with Papera's forelock, Teuru spoke.

"Nini," she said. "Monoi and Nini. Viriamu wishes to thank you and thank you and thank you."

Joyfully Papera's parents sprang to their feet and smothered me with embraces.

"Teuru," I said when I had extricated myself, "something must be done in return."

"You have already done something for them today," she reminded me.

"That may be. More is required. What shall it be?"

She came and whispered in my ear.

"Will that please them?" I asked dubiously. "It seems hardly a fair exchange."

"It always pleases," she stated confidently.

"Very well." I turned to Nini and Monoi. "My dears," I informed them, "you shall have the finest suckling pig that breathes."

## XXVII. *Night Sailing*

"NO, TITI," I SAID, "you don't want to go to Papeete."

"But I do! And why not? Papera is going. As always, Teuru and Tavae are going. Take me with you, Viriamu."

It was well after midnight. Mama Ruau had come to rouse us and warn that we must move if we were to meet *Poti Raiatea* at the port by break of day. Toma must have been keeping vigil, because as soon as our lamp was turned up he looked in the door to make sure that we were truly stirring and then went the rounds of the village passing the word along. So, despite the unseasonableness of the hour, all Haapu was awake and a great many of its people had crowded into our house to impede the final preparations for departure. The chest of chiming bells that contained my books and papers had been dragged into the center of the room. I sat on one side of the lid and Papera, in the new belly-button-covering shirt that Teuru had promised, on the other. He wore also an enormous hat with flaring brim that vaguely resembled a sombrero. It effectively hid both his eyes and ears.

"I should like," said Titi, who had stopped before us, "I should like much to see the house of Tuini."

"Quinn's is no place for you," I replied emphatically. The very idea of Titi at Quinn's made me shudder.

"Teuru says it is gay."

"There is sufficient gaiety right here."

Titi pouted and, as always, looked very attractive doing it. The lanterns of those who had come to comment and advise on our last-minute packing were scattered over the floor amid the chaos of bulging pareu-covered bundles, boxes, niau baskets, orange-filled nets, banana stalks, sacks of green coffee beans, pearl shells, back bones of sharks and a hundred other presents brought by friends the evening before. On the ground just outside was a bamboo crate containing a score of clamorous white ducks, the lavish offering of the chief. Waiting at the water's edge was a long, graceful outrigger adzed from enduring mango wood, the work and gift of Natua. Even as our arrivals at

Haapu were never empty-handed, so, too, with our departures. Whether we were bound up wind or down, a small fleet was required for our transport, and the fact that much of the cargo represented a carrying of coals to Newcastle mattered not at all.

Mama Ruau rose from her place near the door and removed the slender cigarette from her mouth. "There has been enough of tying and untying, arranging and rearranging. Everyone has seen what the popaa takes with him and has said what he wished to say. Now let all be taken to the canoes."

No further excuse for delay remaining, the business of transfer began. The confusion of gear about us quickly disappeared and soon Papera and I sat alone in the middle of a bare floor. Tavae and Titi came in.

"If you will remove yourselves ...." Tavae suggested politely.

We got off the chest and he shouldered it. Because the hat made it impossible for Papera to see where he was going, Titi took him in her arms. We went down the three coconut-bole steps - steps already worn smooth by the many bare feet that had mounted and descended them - and found ourselves in a night made luminous by a full moon. Mama Ruau stood at the corner of the house beneath the purau tree and I walked with her to the shore.

"Your paths are made bright tonight, Viriamu," she said quietly. "Remember that it is as easy to come as to go."

"No, Mama Ruau. Coming is far the easier."

She smiled. "A hoi mai - return; and bring my children with you."

Our cheeks touched lightly, first one, then the other, and I stepped into the canoe.

Among those who held the gunwales, ready to send us on our way, was old Marii, and he bent to put his mouth close to my ear. "If the trouble is not too great I should like to have you send me one of the little hand-lamps that go on and off by finger flicking."

"A flashlight will be on the next boat," I promised. "Is there anything else?"

"A few kilos of line for mending the net, if you would be so good."

"Agreed."

"It has been long since I have tasted salmon ... "

"I shall gather a number of tins. Is that all?"

"Well, there is another thing." He paused, cleared his throat and began again in slightly better voice. "I think of a thing that could cheer us in your absence, a thing that warms and makes quick the tongue, that . . ."

"No, Marii. I am sorry. There will be no rum."

"Then a small amount of wine?"

"Perhaps."

"Thank you, Viriamu, thank you." He raised his arm in signal. "Now," he whispered, "go safely over the sea."

Those who clustered about us gripped the rail and shot the canoe swiftly our onto the lagoon. Simultaneously a half dozen other craft were launched,

but for several moments while the canoes glided under the impetus given them from shore, no paddle was dipped and our eyes clung to the people and the village that we left behind. As always at the instant of departure, I had trouble to see clearly and the many lanterns strung along the strand seemed to wink and dance and sway. The figures holding them wavered, and the softly gray, moon washed line of sloping roofs blurred. This may seem unreasonable, even foolish. After all, a sailing for Tahiti means separation by a scant hundred miles. Haapu will endure although it is unseen. But it is a weakness I shall never overcome, and it is one that Teuru and Tavae share. Perhaps it is because our love of that bit of ground and of those who walk upon it is so great. Or perhaps it is the faint doubt that persists within the mind, a question in which there may be a lurking trace of fear. "Will it be granted you to live here once again?" If one could know, it would be different.

"Lift the paddles," they called. "Go, Viriamu. Go, Tavae and Teuru. Go, little Papera!"

"Thanks, thanks," the replies went back. "We go. Do you remain!"

Yes, I thought, remain. Return to your homes, turn low the lamps, lay yourselves down on the fragrant pandanus and find there the untroubled sleep that belongs to those for whom tomorrow holds no anxiety, no uncertainty, no peril or contention. Rest secure in the knowledge that the coming day will be like the one just past. Remain, Haapu - unchanging.

"A hoe!" Tavae commanded. The paddles bit the water and I turned away, faced forward, as we set out from the bay heading for the moon.

The canoe that Natua had hewn for us was large. Its beam was such that Papera was able to sit on the rounded bottom with his hips only slightly compressed at either side. And it was long. Beginning at the bow, it comfortably accommodated Teuru, Titi, Papera, myself and Tavae in the order named. While the others sent us along, Papera trailed his hands in the cool, dark water and, with my own hands folded and back against the crate of ducks which balanced just behind me, I did even less. We led a procession of seven canoes and as we emerged from the channel the escort craft spread out to right and left. Spaced by a hundred feet or more, we continued abreast, each outrigger rising in black silhouette from the silvered lagoon. Arrived at the entrance of the bay, the formation swung about so that our prows pointed northward. There, beyond many another inlet, many a screening headland and outthrust peninsula, the tiny port settlement of Fare waited for the dilapidated schooner whose name means Clear-distant-sky. Had we gone directly, the stretch of coast lying between us and our destination might have been covered in a brief two hours, thus making it fairly certain that we should meet and board the unpredictable *Poti*. But who, in Polynesia, ever thinks to go directly?

"Tavae," said Teuru over her shoulder. "Shall we make for the reef?"

"Sure," said Tavae, and shifted course accordingly.

"What for"I asked.

"Would you have us arrive fishless in Papeete?" Teuru asked.

"We shall find plenty of fish at the market."

"Will you never learn, Viriamu? We should be shamed not to bring fish of Huahine. And crabs, and shrimp, and perhaps a few varo."

"Is there time? Are you sure *Poti Raiatea* is not already at her berth"

"Who can say?"

"I think I should prefer to be shamed than to miss the boat."

Teuru's easy laughter rang out over the water, and from the most distant canoe to starboard there came a musical answering cry. It might have been given by a boy, a man, or a girl. There can be no telling from falsetto. The strange fragment of melody was the same I had heard a thousand times before in a dozen different islands, always with an unaccountable, responsive tingle of the spine. Where does it come from, what does it mean? What prompts its utterance? Why does it seem so weird, so charged with mystery? I wish I knew. One might draw a staff and set down each of three rising, three falling notes on a minor scale and give no inkling of the eerie call. It is a thing that must be heard, a thing depending for its singular effect upon the timbre of the native voice, upon the sound diffusing quality of a broad lagoon, the deep accompanying rumble of a lonesome reef, and one may never hope to shut it up within a book or room. I would go so far as to say that it cannot even be confined within the present day, and that what strikes the ear now, in the twentieth century, comes from a singing in this people's blood that is an echo - an echo that rises from the ancient past, from the forgotten natal land. Only see how swiftly and how far the haunting cry travels on Huahine alone.

Tavae tilts back his head, opens his throat, and with fresh vigor the brief, lifting, then descending, refrain pours forth. For a moment it hovers above us, tremulous in the night In the next instant it has taken flight and is hurrying dwindling down the shadowed coasts. But no more than seconds pass before it is revived. As the legendary king called Tumu-nui once plucked a magical arrow from the sky, so the six elusive notes of the lament are caught by someone a half mile or a mile away. They are not to be held; they will escape. They may be grasped only long enough to gain new life from another pair of native lungs before they go winging on again. Soon the sound is lost to us, yet there is little time to wait for is sure return. It has rounded the northernmost promontory, has swung to the island's windward side, to the village of Maroe, to Tefarerei, to Parea, to the cliffs that face the south. Now, once more, we can detect a quiver in the air. Faint at first, then clearer louder it rushes toward us. Suddenly the plaintive cry rises from the canoe riding farthest to our left, and the circuit of Huahine is made complete.

But the phenomenon is not limited to Huahine. I do not have to be in Raiatea to know that the twenty-three-mile water gap has as easily been bridged, and that the same thing will happen on that larger island. I have heard it there, and in the four corners of Polynesia. Similarly, I do not need to have set foot in Havaiki, or even to know where it lies, to be convinced that what

we hear are enduring echoes of a voice calling across ages and oceans from that primal homeland.

"Will you come with us and cut your feet on the coral, Viriamu, or will you sit?" Teuru asked.

"I shall stay with Papera."

"Very well. You may hand us the ramas."

Tavae had brought the canoe broadside to the inland bank of the coral barrier. Now he and the two girls took many pronged harpoons and stepped out upon it. Ramas are great torches two or three yards long, made by binding coconut fronds tightly together. I reached behind me where they rested on the crate of ducks and passed them over, one to each.

"Matches?" Tavae inquired.

I felt around, found one and struck it, shielding it from the gentle breeze. The torches were dipped low over the gunwale, their spreading tops, like so many huge feather dusters, held one above the other. I touched the match to a single pointed, brittle leaf and instantly, with a loud snapping and crackling, the entire mass burst into brilliant yellow flame. The bearers swung the ramas high above their heads and a shower of glowing particles swept out to fade and die at sea.

With a foot Tavae pushed off the canoe. "Follow us as we go," he instructed.

The balance of the flotilla had followed our lead. To right and left along the pitted causeway a dozen other ramas blazed. I took up the paddle, but no more than an occasional indolent stroke was necessary to keep abreast of our reef-walking party, and though the bow still pointed in the general direction of the port of Fare our pace had slowed to a crawl. Yet I had lost all impatience. Much as I prefer, once goodbys are said, to catch the appointed sailing, and well as I knew that by the time *Poti* touches Huahine on the return journey her captain longs for his wife and so frequently ups anchor in the earliest dawn, I was ready to take my chances and to tarry. For the islands present few sights to equal a rama-fishing, and few nights more perfect than that through which we drifted. A glance at Papera showed me that he was not in a position to appreciate either with any continuity. Now and then, to be sure, the light land breeze lifted the absurd hat sufficiently to allow him a transitory glimpse, but almost immediately it dropped over his eyes to shut him again in uninteresting darkness. He accepted the situation with his usual stoicism and, never thinking to complain, continued blindly dabbling his little hands in the water.

I leaned toward him. "Why don't you take it off, Papera?"

"Eaha?"

"The hat. Take it off."

He shook his head, and the great brim wagged from side to side.

"Why not? Do you like it?"

Again the hat wagged negatively.

"Here, let me have it."

"No. Teuru says it is pretty. Teuru says not to touch."

The breeze freshened slightly and the hat floated up to dis-close Papera's round, solemn eyes. It continued higher so that even his brows came into view. Then, once more, the breeze failed and the hat of leaves dispiritedly subsided.

"All right," I said. "Do as Teuru says. Don't touch."

Papera complied. And when, a few moments later, a more lively and playful puff of wind came brushing the water to our canoe, he remained impassive. The hat began to flutter and, as soon as they were in the clear, Papera's eyes rolled upward, following its ascent. It reached his brow and kept on going. I cleared his small pate, and sailed away. We watched till it had glided to make silent contact with the lagoon several canoe lengths off.

"Gone," said Papera.

We smiled at each other in satisfaction, and then gave our undivided attention to the world about us. What effect this world had on my shipmate, I do not know. Being born to it, he very likely accepted it as casually as he had the monstrous and confining hat. The expression of his face, which was one of simple and quiet content, led me to believe so. But when Huahine swims in moonlight, no popaa, unless he is an uncommonly sluggish one, either can or would achieve such nonchalance. I soon forgot to paddle, forgot where we were going, whom we were following or why.

The currents that slowly eddy near the reefs on nights of calm took charge of our canoe, bearing us lightly, soundlessly shoreward, then seaward again in lazy circles, in figure eights, in listless maneuvers too intricate to describe. Soothed, perhaps, by our dreamy, undirected roving, the ducks were silent in their bamboo cage. So, too, were the small islander and I. We neither spoke nor moved. We never turned our heads, and there was no need. Each gazed over, above and beyond the other, allowing the spirits of the lagoon that played upon the rounded mango keel to determine what segment of the night's circumference he should view. As if our slender craft were a compass needle about which a magnet is capriciously moved, the bow leisurely veered from north to south, or east to west, first clockwise, then counter clockwise, then back again. Wherever it traced a path on the horizons, my eyes followed; wherever it swung it brought unspeakable beauty before them, but it was beauty that varied, that merged into fresh patterns with each degree of arc through which we passed.

At one moment, with the moon behind me, I faced the long vista of lagoons that led back to Haapu, to the submarine valleys of the toadstool people, and still farther to the dangerously narrow pass through which we sometimes slipped to hunt bonito on the outer ocean. Protected waters, level as a table top, smooth as glass, and - save for the reflection close about us of pale stars directly overhead-black as jet. But the black plain moved, or the canoe moved. They both moved, the one languidly revolving in one direction, the other in the opposite. Thus darkness was cast away and the faintly

luminous land mass of Huahine took its place. First came the low, coconut-studded southern shores, then rising hills, then tumbled central peaks with capping, high-piled tiers of cloud. From end to end Huahine swept past in majestic review. From end to end it absorbed the light of the full moon. Yet a fraction of that light each frond and leaf and fine-grown slope transmuted and returned so that all the island seemed aglow with a soft radiance of dim and hazy blue. It was a prospect to make one glad to linger. But to remain stationary would have required wielding of the paddle. Besides, it is generally fruitless to struggle against the forces of nature. The easier and more sensible course is to bend to the winds and tides. Accordingly, Papera and I maintained our attitudes of detached repose, permitting the fickle, winding currents to have their will of us. Huahine passed beyond my ken, and we swung around so that I confronted the blazing Sea-of-the Moon.

In this position I also stared directly into the brightly burnished planet in which the goddess Hina has her abode. As is commonly known, Hina stepped from her canoe to her present home when the moon was riding this very sea. On the night and at the time of which I am speaking, however, the great orb was some distance aloft - possibly a third of the way from Raiatea's highest mountain to the zenith. Nevertheless, I could clearly distinguish the pandanus house in which she lives, and the gigantic banyan tree that grows beside it. Hina herself is less easily discovered by other than Polynesian eyes, and I have never seen her. Probably it is for lack of crying. Because, aside from the obvious improvement of a dusky goddess over an old man, and aside from its greater size, the tropical moon is in no way superior to that of Kansas or New England. The difference consists in what it does to all that lies beneath-to atolls, to islands, to the oceans in between. I lowered my eyes, leaving Hina to her lonely game of hide and-seek.

Our canoe now rested in the mouth of a molten river, a river of shimmering light that flowed toward us across the sea. Narrowly compressed by banks of darkness at the distant source, it fanned out ever more broadly as it rode the intervening miles, spreading ever more widely the confining borders, rolling back the night to either side until, at Huahine's very threshold, it burst its bonds entirely and flooded the whole of the South Pacific. A nearly dormant ocean supported the tremendous, silvered stream, yet there was massively indolent motion on its gleaming surface. Slow billows rose and fell, billows that lifted forward at each languid pulse, that dissolved at last with the low mutter of far-off thunder upon the island's coral ramparts, painting them intermittently with phosphorescent coats of foam.

A faint cry came to us. "O Viriamu ...!" And I started up to find that the pilotless canoe had carried us well inshore. Apparently the general set of the current was in the direction of Haapu, and we had retrograded to such an extent that the rama-fishers were grown small. The call came again. One of the ramas waved, and I reached for the paddle.

"Fast," said Papera. "Go fast"

Short as was the time he had belonged to me, there was already nothing I would not attempt for Papera. I swung the paddle furiously and Natua's sleek canoe cut the water at what seemed to me a satisfactory clip.

"Faster," said Papera.

I went all out, and for a few minutes achieved a speed so exhilarating that the ducks came to life and set up an excited quacking. Papera threw back his head and laughed. Then I stopped and laid the paddle across the thwarts.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I am resting," I explained.

Teuru is calling."

"Never mind."

"Teuru does not tire; Tavae does not tire."

"Never mind."

We had, however, made headway and less than a quarter mile remained to be covered. The other canoes, manned by more attentive crews than ours, lay bunched together a short distance off that area where the fishing went on. Beaded at intervals along the reef's inner border, ten or eleven flares still shed ruddy light upon the shoulders of those who carried them. It was warm light that waxed and waned - flaming riotously when a binding cord burned through and loosed a fresh tuft of fronds, then gradually dimming to a deeper, smoke-tipped tongue of red until the next lashing was consumed. Each man and woman picking a careful way along the pocked and fissured paths moved in an alternately brightening fading aura of his own. Each man and woman walked with eyes bent on the lagoon at his feet, watching the waters which the torch splashed with color, waiting for the fish to rise. An arm would flash out. A five-pronged spear would slash the surface, shattering the rama's image and impaling, more often than not, the elusive game. "Mea rahi - a big thing!" Always it was a big thing, and the glad cries rang out time and time again.

But another cry continued to plague us. "Viriamu-u-u! We have all that we can carry. Come, come, come!"

Papera looked up at me doubtfully. "Teuru says to come .... "

"Yes. We will go."

"Fast?"

"No. Softly. That is best."

Neither Papera nor the ducks were enthusiastic over the moderate pace at which I sent us forward, but I paid them no attention and had come to within a stone's throw of Tavae and Teuru when I saw the headless swimmer. It struck me as strange, because we were far from the place he haunts. Then I saw that I had been mistaken, and that it was a large turtle cruising, as they often do, with neck upraised. It turned out to be Titi.

She dove beneath us, reappeared on the outrigger side, drew herself up effortlessly between Papera and myself and sat on the side with legs trailing in the lagoon. Moonlight and sea water screamed from her hair, her arms and breasts. She bent near, faintly smiling, pleading. "You will take me? You will

take me to Papeete?"

"For the hundredth time, Titi, no."

"But I wish to learn. Like Teuru, I wish to see and learn."

It should not be surprising that what an inaccessible and perhaps non-existent vahine-in-the-moon accomplished from a most remote station, Titi, with her obvious advantages, brought about with even greater celerity and ease. Which is to say that my paddling quickly lost what little vigor it had had, became absent-minded, listless, then ceased altogether. I drifted. Worse than before.

The girl's oval face came nearer, lifted to me in mute appeal, waited for an answer that I failed to give. "Do you not want me to have knowledge?" she asked at last.

"Titi," I said sincerely, "you have plenty."

"Plenty?" Her large eyes widened questioningly.

Titi's hand found mine where it rested inert upon the paddle. "Viriamu," she said gently. "It is not so. What do I know? Nothing. I would like to learn to dance the popaa dances and sing the popaa songs. I would like to learn to ride the foot pushed-wheel, to put color on my lips, to tie my hair above my head, and to wear many kinds of clothes."

It was a pretty little speech, prettily delivered. And if I had begun to toy with any thought of Titi's voyaging, it served to bring me to my senses. I got us under way and Titi brought her slim legs aboard.

"Is that all?" I asked her.

"Well, it would also please me to understand the popaa way of love."

"Enough."

"I go?"

"No."

"Aue!"

Tears would, I am afraid, almost certainly then have mingled with the drops of brine which still glittered on Titu's cheeks if a chorus of shouts had not come to interrupt them.

"Tero! - Sail ho! - Tero!"

All three of us stood in the canoe. "Where?" I cried.

There!" Teuru called, and swinging the flaming rama round her head she cast it out to sea.

Our eyes followed it and so discovered the ghostly gray shape of the schooner *Poti Raiatea* standing in for the Fare pass.

"Vite Monsieur Beel, vite!" It was Tavae, and the words were French because already we were as good as in Tahiti.

I hurried, and when we had come alongside, Teuru and her brother leaped for the canoe, bringing harpoons and filled baskets of fish with them. Competent hands quickly seized the paddles and we drove forward with long sweeps that sent Papera's head and mine nodding in rhythmic unison.

Fast as we went, *Poti* arrived before us. We rounded the last point of

separating land. The bright light of gasoline pressure lamps winked at us from the rows of coffee shops across the bay, and boldly limned before them were the tall spars of Captain Hema's tired schooner.

When we clambered out onto the wharf the crew was returning from the restaurant, where they served a hot drink consisting of sugar and cognac and other things. Our cargo was slung over *Poti's* rail, our canoe balanced on the roof close to the outboard john. No sooner was it done than the stubby captain appeared in his taxi driver's cap and unbuttoned pajama coat. Grimy-faced Pierrot, the affable engineer, followed him. We were just in time.

"Come on," said Hema. "We're leavin' soon's I blow the whistle. Been gone five days this trip. Five days is too damn long when you've got a vahine waitin' in Papeete."

Hastily we embraced all those who were there to see us off, and then moved over to the port side to watch them set out once more for Haapu. The canoe in which Titi rode came close beneath us.

"You will come back?" she asked uncertainly.

"But of course, aiu," Teuru replied. "We always come back."

"Soon?"

Teuru looked to me.

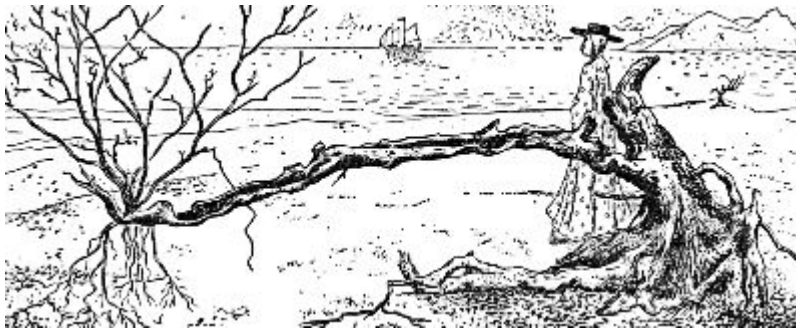
"Soon," I said, and they drew away.

Captain Hema mounted the galley and with one arm about the foremast, signaled with the other for lines to be cast off. He reached for the whistle cord and yanked it with customary savagery. Pierrot had the wind ready and it blew. The diesel snorted and we moved from the small group of sleepy-eyed people who stood upon the quay.

It was nearly dawn. *Poti's* helm was put hard down and the old schooner began a circle of the bay that would bring her about to face the pass. It was a circle that would also bring her across the bows of the half dozen outriggers bound to our village down the coast. But first, for brief seconds, we found them between ourselves and the full moon which lay low upon the horizon a little to the south of Raiatea. One after another as they glided across its shining face, the occupants of each canoe were shown to us in clear, black outline.

Titi, I thought, when her young body stood forth in bold relief, it is truly better here. Stay. And stay exactly as you are. It was only an instant; then she was gone.

In another moment, having missed her opportunity, Hina, too, had disappeared. She might as easily have slipped into Titi's canoe as she once so ill-advisedly left her own. My estimation of the goddess precipitately declined. For what stupidity could be greater than failure to seize a chance to live again on the island Huahine?



## XXVII. *Old Mother of Haapu*

IT IS NEVER EASY to say farewell to Huahine. But whereas leave-taking of Haapu need not be final ( there comes always another sailing) my adieu to Teuru's mother must be the last, and that is still the harder. She has left us since first these pages were begun. In my thoughts Mama Ruau, her island and her village, will always be inseparable. I shall never be able to think of one without recalling as well the beauty of all three. So, although this ending speaks of, and to, the gentle matriarch who was so deeply loved, it means through her to voice as well one man's affection for the fair small land she graced during the many, many years.

A narrative that has rambled as carefree as this one has sought to do should not close upon a note of gloom - and such is far from my intention. If shadows cross the page they will not stay for long, and if another chapter followed it would show, you may be sure, the sun again bright-shining. That is the way of Huahine and of Tahiti, too. Clouds may come and hover briefly on the mountains and cast a temporary twilight in the valleys, and in the villages by the sea. But the trades will not permit their tarrying and soon hurry them away. Similarly, sadness may brush the lagoon-side dwellers, but the warmth of life within them soon dispels it like early morning mist. Even the passing of Mama Ruau shall not dim too long the natural cheeriness of her people. Their laughter will reawaken, and the songs burst forth anew. Because of this it should not, however, be imagined the beloved is forgotten. It is merely the first shock and pain of parting that is quickly, rightly conquered. The village moves on. The men wield their paddles and their swift harpoons, the women warm the oven stones and suckle the babes who are setting out on the pleasant path that Mama Ruau serenely, contentedly followed to its end. Fresh fronds are cut and woven, tall bamboo split and laced so that new homes may rise to replace those the sun and rain have crumbled. Love is made so that new life may grow within them.

These things, together with many others, are and must be done, for they

are the living pattern of the secluded bit of Polynesia known as Haapu. They are the simple, satisfying things that Mama Ruau shared so long, and which in a sense she continues still to share. While we who knew her draw our breaths she cannot be quite lost to us. Her presence was too real and close just to vanish with the night. The little lantern that she carried now hangs from a nail driven in a low rafter of her home. It was too much hers for any other to think to use and it will not again be lighted. But, strangely, since the tiny flame it held was allowed to gutter out, she whose way it feebly illumined seems nearer than before. Where once she might be met in distinct and isolated places-on the jungle bordered, insect-humming river trail, at the oval sing-house, by the cooking fires of her fare-tutu - now one feels her everywhere. Though in her lifetime it was never her own children alone for whom she cared, today she is known to be the watchful mother of the entire populace. And because there was a time when I was asked to be another son, because Mama Ruau's heart held ample room for yet one more to enter in, I believe that in her thoughts I, also, became a part of Haapu. That I did so in my own mind is certain; and perhaps no more is needed to explain my conviction that she forgets us as little as we do her.

The tears have dried - and they fell throughout the village like warmly showering rain - yet the thought of her is still with us wherever we go upon her island. The keening chants have all been sung-and they rose like soft evening wind sighing round the gray palm boles - yet her spirit still clings to those she knew. This implies, of course, nothing of the mysterious or supernatural. It is simply that Mama Ruau lived not only in physical Haapu, but deep within each of its inhabitants. What could be more reasonable, then, than the belief that, as always, she keeps a place among her many friends and relatives? Her voice, her quiet speech, her very words find in theirs an echo; their happiness or sorrow, their thoughts and emotions are reflections of her own, for on everyone she left the gentle imprint of herself. This much of immortality comes sometimes to human kind. In her children and in theirs, in all her fellow villagers, Mama Ruau lives on beyond her span. With them she continues to walk the cool grasses in the shaded lanes between the twin rows of humble, friendly dwellings. With them she stops to gossip beneath the breeze stirred thatching of the eaves. Through their clear brown eyes she watches the fishes' shadow-movements in the depths of the lagoons even as she watched them on the day of her youngest daughter's precipitate arrival. With their keen sight she beholds as well the soaring frigate birds, the terns and cranes and wide-winged gulls; she follows the white-sided squalls of swirling rain as they roam the ocean between her island and the next, and follows, too, the better regulated travel of stars as they pass across the sloping strip of sky that forms a roof for Haapu. In each of her villagers a little of Mama Ruau persists. None could fail to absorb his share. And so it is that for her the days continue to unfold, the sweet trades to blow, the tiare to bud and blossom. With each dawning Huahine rises from the Sea-of-the-Moon as

fabled Maui ordained that it should do. Each morning clean-washed, refreshed and brightly green after the night's slumber in the deep, it lifts its peaks to meet the sun. With each turning of the earth it is reborn, yet always, to those who lived upon it with her, it remains Mama Ruau's island and they often speak her name.

Now that a little time has flown, it is happiness to talk of her. Recalling the things she did and said, recalling what she was to us, no longer brings sadness in its wake. Rather, the abundant recollections cause lips to smile in gratitude that memories should be so rich and full. Especially in the hush of the tropic evenings thoughts gravitate to her, and at such times in small house after house up and down the length of the village those within will invite her to join again the circle round the flickering lamp. In manner difficult to define, what ensues gives the impression, not of words spoken about some one who is gone, but of conversations with a presence near and real, conversations held for no other reason than the pleasure, the comfort and the sense of continuing companionship that they bring to life. But there are other times, and they are quite as frequent, when Mama Ruau is recalled for her needed wisdom and advice, and on these occasions, too, the present tense is used. It is impossible to imagine a situation, a problem, a trouble arising in Haapu which did not one day present itself to her as well. Human living holds no essential experience that she did not, in one year or another, meet along the way. So whether the matter be little - seeming or very, very great Mama Ruau may be depended upon to guide them to the light.

Has Here sprained an ankle in her play?

"Ahe, ahe," her mother murmurs sympathetically. "Don't cry, child - Mama Ruau tells us how to ease the hurt. She bids us soothe with flower-scented oil, with hands gentle as hers; so and so and so. You see? Ahe, ahe - now lie quietly, my little one, while I go with her to the cool falls of Maroe where the sweet fern grows. There we'll gather them one by one and return to bind them snugly on. Be patient and we will step lightly, Mama Ruau and I. ... "

Or perhaps it is stout Tihoni, best of our fishermen, who at evening has returned without a catch.

"Luck was wanting?" his wife inquires as he spreads the casting-net on a bush to dry.

"The fish were wary," he admits.

"Then your day was long and lonely."

"Not lonely, Vahine. Mama Ruau bore me company. All the afternoon she walked beside me in the shallows."

Vahine smiles. "Were you not shamed before her to be out-witted by the fish?"

"Neither before her then, nor before my wife now. I will tell you why. In my ear Mama Ruau repeated many truths that I had near forgotten, and one of them it would be well for you again to hear. It is this: even the cleverest of

fishers (myself, for instance) should now and then come empty-handed to his home. Thus he is given to know the feelings and chagrin of those less able whose normal state is fishless. And so also he is reminded that to them he should be generous when he draws his net and finds it full."

Vahine will nod her head in understanding agreement "Ah, yes. Often I have heard Mama Ruau make excuse with those very words when she herself has returned in a canoe holding nothing but her hook and line."

Or it may be that Teuru has been called to the house of a neighbor where a girl is about to have a first child.

"Hasten, Teuru," urges the young husband meeting her at the door. "The babe is anxious to be born. Come in, our sister, and let Old Mother enter too."

"Yes, Poro," she answers, speaking calmly her mother's words, "we will enter." She makes her way through the expectant throng gathered without. "But quiet yourself. This is a day for gladness, not one for useless, weak alarm. Have you placed oil in a shell?"

"It is here."

"There is water from the spring?"

"In plenty."

"And the knife of fresh bamboo?"

"The knife was cut this morning and is new and sharp and clean."

"You have done well, Poro. Mama will be pleased."

The young man grins proudly. "A bed is also made. It is a box given by Ah Moy from which the tins of beef are emptied out and green leaves laid below."

"Many a father has shown less of wit" Teuru commends. "But I do not see the limes."

"Aue!" cries Poro, stricken. "The limes have been forgot."

"Well, go quickly then and find me two that will weep when they are pressed."

After he has gone, Teuru greets the women who sit ready waiting in the house that has suddenly become the most interesting of Haapu, then takes a place close beside the girl and reaches for her hand. "All is done, Vaea. Are you ready now to let the babe come forth?"

"I think," she whispers, "that aiu wishes to arrive quickly. But ..."

Looking down, Teuru sees her very young. "Yes?"

"I am unhappy. Teuru, I am afraid."

"Na reira - there, there," Teuru comforts, brushing the girl's dark hair back from a moist forehead. "Certain things, at certain times, Mama Ruau teaches we should rightly fear. But this is no such thing or time. This, says she, is the reason of our being, the reason of our village and our island. Have you not thought, Vaea, that it was for this the men raised the rafters of our homes, the women wove the roofing thatch, the children gathered stones for oven-lining? Why do you suppose our canoes and paddlemen and divers go out each day to find food within the waters? Why are songs made and sung, stories dreamed

and told? For what do we laugh or dance or build or plan? All has one end only, and that is the aiu you bring to us in Haapu. All exists, all is done to give him a fair and pleasant dwelling place. So Mama Ruau says, and therefore it is true. Can there then be cause for fear? No, child, it does not belong with us on this glad morning, and if any clings to you let it slip away. Let it pass to Mama Ruau in whose wisdom it will dwindle small and disappear. Whom can we better trust than she who has lived so much, who has seen so many babies born, who with her own deft hands drew most of us who are here today from warm darkness to place us on the land? You may be sure, Vaea, she knows, she knows, she knows .... "

The girl's large eyes rest gratefully upon Mama Ruau's daughter as the soothing words flow on and although her hand, at more rapidly recurring intervals, clasps tightly about Teuru's a faint smile of quiet confidence returns to her lips each time between the pains. Yet soon she cannot repress a cry.

"Aue! A difficult thing!"

Seated with slightly parted legs outstretched before her, Teuru quickly, gently draws the girl between and over them so that they form firm support on either side. Vaea is lifted till her head lies cradled between Teuru's well-developed breasts, till her back and shoulders rest close to Teuru's mid-riff.

"Hold me tightly here and here," Teuru advises, and the girl's fingers dig deep in the strong, capable brown arms by which she is enfolded. "Aiu must make a path that many others may follow with more ease. Grip hard, grip fiercely, and so clasp Old Mother to you where she may share the pain. That, too, she has known - time, time again, beneath a roof like this, beneath the open sky. She still accepts and welcomes it still comes when called upon to lighten and relieve. Yes, you have found the way: like that, like that - press hard, Vaea-itie against your Mama Ruau."

When the babe has come and has been heard and bathed and dried and wrapped in a new, flower-splashed pareu, Teuru holds him up to Poro who stands uncertainly by the door. "A tamarii," she says. "It is a boy that you have made. Come now and put the lime juice in his eyes."

Poro cuts the fruit with unsteady hand and going to Teuru holds it above the small upturned face of his son. "What number of drops does Mama instruct us to let fall . . .?"

"For each eye three are required; one to awaken, one to make clear, and the last to give brilliance a great many years."

"Yes, Mama Ruau. It is done, it is done."

In a hundred such ways the mother of Haapu is daily referred to, acknowledged and consulted. As has been seen, it is far more than a matter of vague, unspeaking memories. She remains a vital, sustaining force, and so strong is the sense of her unseen presence that hardly a villager need do more than close his eyes while holding her in thought to find with truest inner sight that she is clearly, surely visible as well. Every man who does this simple thing obtains, of course, a different image, for each one so discovers Mama

Ruau as he knew and loved her best. And if in search of her my own eyelids lower, the picture which comes to impinge upon them will always be the same.

It is a picture of night, of night caressingly soft, night belonging to Huahine where mountains have not the lofty stature that brings Tahiti's chill. Within the framing darkness there stands a native fare. It is broad and long and many stilts sup port it in the ground. The blurred outline of its roof fuses with the blacker shadow of an over-arching purau tree. The house that Mama Ruau bade us build, that her brother Natua planned, that all her village reared for me beside the ever changing, ever wonder-filled lagoon. In the open doorway - the doorway thoughtfully made so wide that, shoulder to shoulder, friends by twos and threes might enter - a small flame burns and beside it a patient, unmoving figure waits. The figure is Mama Ruau surrounded by the voluminous folds of a mother-hubbard spreading over the rough board floor; the flame - barely stronger than the glowing leaf of her cigarette is held within the little lantern of glass and rusting tin. And why is she there? Because the popaa is elsewhere - at the chief's, at Natua's, or away with the men who fish with torch and canoe. No matter how late, she'll await his return, for no house should be empty, no house should be dark and inviting to' ghosts once the sun has gone down. By placing the lamp and herself at the threshold she keeps wandering spirits at bay; she keeps life in the house and sits ready to welcome me home.

Such was always the picture that met me when I came back from wherever I'd chanced to go, when I mounted the coconut boles and stood under the roof inside. Such too is the picture that recurs to me now.

Mama Ruau lifts her head, smiles her warming smile as I seat myself beside her with only the lantern between. Our eyes meet over the pin-point flame and for a moment we are near to each other, I think, as ever it's given to humans to be.

Our words will seem of little import.

"O oe, Viriamu - it is you. All is well here within your fare."

"Thank you, Mama. Thank you for guarding it so."

"There was good talk at Marii's?"

"In large amount. We spoke at great length of this and of that."

"A very good thing. And now we may rest."

By the meaning of words is not always of consequence. It may be the sound of the voice - the friendly, long-loved voice - that matters. And this we hear, this we exchange, this we give each other while our eyes still cling.

She rises, goes to the chest against the bamboo wall, lights the lamp that stands upon it.

"I will go," she says returning and taking up the little wind-lantern in her hand. "Taoto maitai, Viriamu - sleep well."

On the bare feet that carried her so long and far over Huahine's warm, rich soil she feels her cautious way down the rounded trunks that form the steps.

Then, picking a careful path among the land-crab holes, walking with no sound other than a faint rustling of her mother-hubbard, she sets out for her home.

"Taoto maitai," I respond. And remain watching till she is lost in darkness and only the winking flame still moves.

Yes, Mama Ruau, wherever you may be - sleep well.

THE END

# *William S. Stone*

The author of *Tahiti Landfall* has lived in French Oceania since 1936. He left Harvard in his junior year to become chief pilot of an aviation school in the Southwest, and later studied law and practised for a time before going to the South Pacific. His father was a Vermonter and a naval officer, so that Mr. Stone's youth was passed in such distant parts of the world as Manila and Nagasaki. A free lance writer for the last ten years, Mr. Stone has collaborated on a number of books with a fellow resident of Tahiti, Nicolas Mordvinoff, the artist whose decorations enliven this book.

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